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Leadership in Times of Crisis: An Analysis of the Prophet's Strategies in Confronting the Pressures of Mecca

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ABSTRACT

The Meccan period is regarded as one of the most critical stages in the formation and expansion of the Islamic call; a period during which the Prophet of Islam and his early followers faced a range of social, economic, and political pressures from the Quraysh. The tribal structure of Meccan society, the city's economic dependence on the Quraysh commercial system, and the status of existing religious traditions created a context in which the Prophet's monotheistic call was perceived as a serious challenge to the dominant order. Under such conditions, opponents attempted to prevent the spread of this call through methods such as social pressure, economic boycott, security threats, and the persecution of Muslims. The main problem of this study is to examine what strategies the Prophet of Islam employed in confronting this critical situation in order to preserve and sustain the Islamic call. The aim of the study is to explain and analyze the Prophet's leadership strategies in managing the crises of the Meccan period and to examine how he confronted the structural pressures of Meccan society. Using a historical-sociological analytical method and drawing on sources of Prophetic biography and Islamic history, this study investigates the issue. The findings indicate that the Prophet employed a set of intelligent strategies in managing the crises of the Meccan period, including strategic patience and avoidance of direct confrontation, social networking among followers, utilization of tribal support, migration as a strategy for reducing pressure, and the management of social conflicts. These strategies enabled the nascent Muslim community to withstand the severe pressures of the Quraysh and prepared the ground for the expansion of the Islamic call in the subsequent stage. Accordingly, the Prophet's leadership during the Meccan period can be regarded as an example of transformational leadership under conditions of structural pressure, which, through the combination of social realism and strategic foresight, paved the way for the continuity and expansion of the Islamic call.

Keywords: crisis leadership, Prophet of Islam, Meccan period, crisis management, Meccan society, Prophetic biography, Islamic call

Introduction

The emergence of Islam in Meccan society at the beginning of the seventh century CE was accompanied by profound intellectual and social transformations. Meccan society at that time had a tribal structure, an economy based on trade, and a set of established religious beliefs and social traditions that together constituted the dominant order of society. The monotheistic da'wa of the Prophet of Islam challenged this intellectual and social order, and this led the Quraysh, as the dominant force in Mecca, to respond to this emerging call in various ways. From the



earliest years of the prophetic mission, Muslims faced different forms of social and economic pressure, as well as security threats; pressures whose purpose was to prevent the spread of the Islamic da'wa and weaken the initial nucleus of the Prophet's followers. Under such conditions, an important issue that can be raised in historical and social studies of early Islam is how the Prophet of Islam confronted this critical situation and what strategies he employed to preserve and sustain the Islamic da'wa. In other words, the fundamental question is what leadership methods and strategies the Prophet of Islam adopted in confronting the extensive pressures of the Quraysh during the Meccan period in order to manage the crisis and preserve the nascent Muslim community, and how these strategies prepared the ground for the continuity and expansion of the Islamic da'wa.

The importance of examining this issue lies in the fact that the Meccan period may be regarded as the stage in which the initial identity of the Islamic community was formed and as a serious test of the Prophet's leadership under conditions of structural pressure. During this period, the Prophet was confronted not only with intellectual and doctrinal opposition but also with a network of social and economic pressures imposed by the powerful groups of the Quraysh. Despite these difficult conditions, the Islamic da'wa was not halted; rather, it gradually strengthened its social foundations and prepared the ground for transition to a new phase of political and social life in Medina. This reality indicates that the Prophet's leadership during this period was characterized by a set of carefully considered measures and strategies, the study and analysis of which can contribute to a deeper understanding of the process through which the Islamic community was formed. Accordingly, the main hypothesis of the study is that, in managing the crises of the Meccan period, the Prophet of Islam employed a leadership model based on strategic patience, the use of existing social capacities, the creation of a network of solidarity among followers, and the adoption of measures such as migration to reduce pressures; and that this set of actions ensured the survival of the nascent Muslim community.

The necessity of this study arises from the fact that many studies concerning the Meccan period have primarily reported historical events and have made fewer attempts to examine these events within an analytical framework related to the concept of leadership under crisis conditions. Therefore, analyzing the Prophet's strategies during this period can open a new horizon in historical and sociological studies of early Islam. Using a descriptive-analytical approach and drawing on authoritative sources of sīra and Islamic history, this study examines this subject and seeks, through an analysis of major events in the Meccan period, to explain the strategic model of the Prophet's leadership in crisis management. The findings of the study indicate that, in confronting the pressures of the Quraysh, the Prophet employed a set of intelligent strategies, such as avoiding premature confrontation, utilizing tribal support, strengthening solidarity among Muslims, and using migration as a means of preserving human resources; strategies that ultimately prepared the ground for the formation of the Islamic community in Medina and the expansion of the Islamic da'wa.

Research Literature

The study of the Meccan period and the manner in which the Prophet of Islam confronted the social and political pressures of the Quraysh is among the topics that have received attention in historical works, sīra literature, and contemporary research. A considerable portion of these studies is rooted in the classical sources of Islamic history and the Prophetic biography. Works such as Ibn Hisham's Prophetic Biography, Ibn Sa'd's The Great Classes, and al-Tabari's History of the Prophets and Kings are among the most important sources that provide relatively detailed reports of the events of the Meccan period, the manner in which the Quraysh opposed the Islamic da'wa, and the

reactions of the Prophet and the Muslims (1-3). These works focus mainly on narrating events, describing the social and economic pressures imposed on Muslims, and recounting events such as the economic boycott of Banu Hashim, the migration to Abyssinia, and the Prophet's efforts to invite various tribes to Islam. Although these sources provide researchers with valuable historical information, they generally adopt a descriptive approach and pay less attention to the structural and strategic analysis of the Prophet's leadership in confronting social crises.

In the contemporary period, Muslim and non-Muslim researchers have attempted to examine the social and historical dimensions of the Islamic da'wa using new analytical methods. Some of these studies have analyzed the social structure of Mecca and the role of the tribal system in shaping reactions to Islam. For example, Montgomery Watt, in his works on the life of the Prophet, examined the social and economic conditions of Mecca and their effect on the spread of Islam, showing that the conflict between the new Islamic values and the economic and social interests of the Quraysh was one of the principal factors behind resistance to the Prophet's da'wa. Among Muslim researchers, works such as those of Rasul Jafarian and Muhammad Hamidullah have examined the political and social transformations of early Islam from a historical perspective and have attempted to analyze the foundations of the formation of the Islamic community within its historical context (4, 5).

Other contemporary studies have used sociological approaches to examine the process of the formation of the Islamic community and the spread of the Islamic da'wa under difficult conditions. In these studies, factors such as social networks among Muslims, the role of migration in preserving the nascent Islamic community, and the importance of tribal ties in supporting the Prophet have been considered. Some studies have also analyzed the role of the migration to Abyssinia and, subsequently, the Prophet's relations with the tribes of Yathrib in preparing the social conditions for transferring the center of the Islamic da'wa from Mecca to Medina. Nevertheless, a considerable part of these studies has focused more on historical or sociological dimensions and has made fewer attempts to analyze the Prophet's actions during the Meccan period within a coherent model of leadership under crisis conditions.

Accordingly, it may be argued that although the research literature on the Meccan period and the early transformations of Islam is extensive, there remains a need for studies that systematically examine the Prophet's leadership strategies in confronting the structural pressures of Meccan society by combining historical data with theoretical frameworks from the social sciences. The present study seeks to address this research gap to some extent by relying on historical sources and using an analytical approach, and to show how a set of carefully considered strategies in managing the crises of the Meccan period led to the continuity of the Islamic da'wa and the formation of a new Islamic community.

Theoretical Foundations and Research Framework:

Examining the leadership of the Prophet of Islam during the Meccan period requires the use of a theoretical framework capable of explaining the social conditions of that period and the manner of confronting extensive pressures. In social studies, one of the key concepts for analyzing such situations is the concept of "crisis." In the social sciences, crisis refers to a situation in which the established order of a society faces a serious challenge and conditions arise in which decision-making and the management of affairs become difficult. In such a situation, a set of external and internal pressures is usually imposed on a group or social system, and the continuation of the previous condition becomes uncertain. Crisis may arise from intellectual conflicts, economic pressures, political threats, or profound cultural changes. The important feature of crisis is that existing structures become limited in

their capacity to respond to the new situation, and consequently the role of leadership in guiding society becomes more significant. Under such conditions, leaders must adopt appropriate strategies both to prevent the collapse of social cohesion and to prepare the path for moving beyond the crisis. With regard to this concept, the Meccan period in Islamic history may be understood as a kind of crisis situation for the nascent Muslim community. During this period, the Prophet's monotheistic da'wa challenged the dominant religious and social order in Mecca, and this led the Quraysh, as the dominant group in society, to display severe and at times organized reactions against it. Social pressures against Muslims, the economic boycott of Banu Hashim, security threats, and attempts to isolate the Prophet and his followers were among the manifestations of this crisis. Under such conditions, the survival of the small Muslim community and the continuity of the Islamic da'wa depended largely on the Prophet's style of leadership and the strategies he adopted to manage this situation. Therefore, the analysis of the Prophet's leadership during this period can be examined within the framework of theories of leadership under crisis conditions. In the social science literature, various theories have been proposed to explain the role of leaders in crisis situations. One of these approaches is the theory of transformational leadership. In this view, a leader is one who can create spiritual and intellectual motivation among followers, prepare them to accept fundamental changes, and present a new vision of the future. Transformational leaders are usually able, under difficult conditions, to mobilize their followers toward long-term goals by strengthening collective identity and creating a sense of shared commitment. This concept is particularly important in analyzing the Prophet's leadership during the Meccan period, because the Prophet not only introduced a new religious da'wa but was also able to create among a limited group of followers a new identity based on faith, religious brotherhood, and moral values; an identity that gradually replaced purely tribal bonds and prepared the ground for the formation of the Islamic community. Another approach used in analyzing leadership under crisis conditions is the theory of charismatic leadership. In this view, the legitimacy and influence of the leader are based largely on personal characteristics, the trust of followers, and the ability to create belief and hope among them. When the existing social order faces crisis, followers usually seek a leader who, by relying on moral credibility and an outstanding personality, can guide them along a new path. In the case of the Prophet of Islam, many researchers have pointed to the role of his moral character, honesty, and social trustworthiness in attracting the support of the early followers. The Prophet's social standing in Mecca, his reputation for integrity and public trust, and the spiritual power of the Islamic da'wa caused a group of individuals to join this call and remain with him even under conditions of pressure and threat. Alongside these two approaches, the theory of environmentally adaptive leadership is also significant for analyzing the behavior of leaders in complex conditions. This theory emphasizes that successful leaders are those who can adapt their strategies to social and environmental conditions. In this perspective, leadership does not merely mean presenting an ideal or goal; it also includes the ability to identify limitations, use available opportunities, and make realistic decisions under changing conditions. This approach is particularly important in analyzing the Prophet's conduct during the Meccan period, because in confronting the pressures of the Quraysh, the Prophet made a set of carefully considered decisions that reflected a form of social realism and an accurate understanding of environmental conditions. Avoiding direct conflict with the Quraysh in the early years of the da'wa, attempting gradually to expand the network of followers, using tribal support, and ultimately adopting the strategy of migration are examples of this strategic adaptation to environmental conditions. Based on these theoretical foundations, the present study seeks to examine the Prophet's leadership strategies during the Meccan period within an analytical model. In this model, the set of actions that the Prophet employed to manage the social and political crises of Mecca can be analyzed along several main axes.

The first axis is strategic patience and avoidance of premature confrontation with the power structure in Mecca. In the early years of the da'wa, the Prophet avoided direct conflict with the Quraysh and focused primarily on explaining the message of monotheism and educating the initial nucleus of followers. This approach enabled the Islamic da'wa to gain the necessary opportunity to become established among a group of believers and prevented its premature destruction. The second axis is the use of tribal support. Although the Islamic da'wa challenged some of the traditional values of the tribal system, the Prophet used the capacities of this same social structure to preserve his relative security. The support of Abu Talib as the head of Banu Hashim is an example of this issue, as it was able to protect the Prophet to some extent against the direct threats of the Quraysh and provide the possibility for the continuation of the da'wa. The third axis is the creation and strengthening of the social network of believers. During the Meccan period, the Prophet sought to create among his followers a form of religious and moral solidarity that went beyond tribal ties. This solidarity enabled Muslims, despite social pressure and persecution, to maintain their bond with the nascent Islamic community and gradually to develop a shared identity based on faith. The fourth axis is the use of migration as a strategy for reducing social pressures and preserving human resources. The migration of a group of Muslims to Abyssinia shows that, when the continued presence of some followers in Mecca involved serious danger, the Prophet considered a practical solution for preserving them. In addition to reducing pressures, this action made it possible for the Muslim community to continue its life in a safer environment. Finally, another axis of this analytical model is the expansion of communication and interaction with tribes outside Mecca. By using opportunities such as the pilgrimage season, the Prophet attempted to convey the message of the Islamic da'wa to other tribes and thereby create new social grounds for supporting Muslims. These contacts ultimately led to the Pledge of al-'Aqaba and prepared the ground for the migration to Medina, which is regarded as a turning point in Islamic history. On this basis, it may be argued that this set of strategies reflects a form of multidimensional leadership in which spiritual, social, and strategic elements were brought together and made it possible to overcome the severe crises of the Meccan period.

Analysis of the Prophet's Strategies in Managing the Meccan Crisis

The management of the Meccan crisis in the sīra of the Prophet of Islam is one of the prominent examples of religious and social leadership under conditions of severe political, social, and economic pressure. During the Meccan period, the Prophet of Islam faced a set of complex crises, including the pressures of the Quraysh, economic and social boycott, threats to life, psychological warfare, and attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the new message. What makes this period important from the perspective of managerial and historical studies is the type of strategies that the Prophet employed to control the crisis, preserve the cohesion of his followers, and maintain the continuity of the da'wa. An examination of historical sources shows that these strategies consisted of a set of intellectual, social, communicative, and political measures that were employed gradually and purposefully.

One of the Prophet's first strategies in managing the Meccan crisis was the gradual initiation of the da'wa and the creation of an initial nucleus of followers. In the first years of the prophetic mission, the Prophet began his da'wa secretly and called only trusted and receptive individuals to Islam. This method enabled an initial network of believers to form before encountering the severe reactions of the Quraysh; a network whose members were doctrinally and psychologically prepared for resistance. Historical sources indicate that this phase lasted for about three years, during which figures such as 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Khadija, Abu Bakr, and a number of other Companions embraced Islam and formed the first nucleus of the Islamic community (1). This strategy demonstrates the Prophet's

accurate understanding of Meccan social conditions and his avoidance of premature confrontation with the Quraysh power structure.

Another important strategy of the Prophet in crisis management was strengthening the doctrinal and psychological foundations of his followers. Under conditions in which Muslims faced persecution and torture, the Prophet sought to strengthen the spirit of resistance and hope among them. Many Qur'anic verses revealed in Mecca emphasized patience, reliance on God, and steadfastness, and recounted examples from the lives of previous prophets in order to strengthen the morale of the believers. This method constituted a form of psychological crisis management through which social and psychological pressures were reduced and followers felt that they were moving within a historical and divine path (6). Strengthening the faith and collective identity of Muslims prevented them from collapsing under the pressures of the Quraysh.

Another important strategy of the Prophet in managing the crisis was the use of tribal and social support. In the tribal society of Mecca, tribal protection played an important role in the security of individuals. Despite the opposition of many leaders of the Quraysh, the Prophet benefited from the support of Abu Talib as the head of Banu Hashim, and this support prevented the Quraysh from easily killing him. This issue shows that the Prophet used existing social structures to reduce dangers and sought to preserve the relative security of himself and his followers within the framework of tribal customs (7). This type of use of social capacities may be understood as an intelligent political strategy in crisis management.

The economic and social boycott of the Muslims in the valley of Abu Talib was one of the most severe crises of the Meccan period. The Quraysh, by signing a pact, decided to deprive Banu Hashim and the Muslims of all economic and social interaction. Under these conditions, the Prophet adopted the strategy of collective resistance and preservation of internal cohesion. Despite severe hardship, Muslims showed solidarity with one another and attempted to use limited resources collectively. This resistance continued for three years and ultimately led to the failure of the policy of boycott (3). This experience shows that the Prophet was able to control the economic crisis by strengthening social solidarity and managing limited resources.

Another strategy of the Prophet in confronting the pressures of Mecca was the expansion of external communications and the search for new bases for the da'wa. When conditions in Mecca became extremely difficult for free activity, the Prophet attempted to extend his da'wa beyond Mecca. The journey to Ta'if was one example of these efforts, although it initially met with a negative reaction. Nevertheless, the Prophet used this experience to establish contacts with various tribes during the pilgrimage season and was gradually able to form relations with some tribes (8). This policy shows that, in managing the crisis, the Prophet sought to create new opportunities and reduce dependence on the crisis-ridden environment of Mecca.

The migration of Muslims to Abyssinia is also among the most important strategies of the Prophet in crisis management. When pressures on Muslims increased, the Prophet permitted a group of them to migrate to the land of Abyssinia, a land ruled by a just king. This decision not only saved the lives of many Muslims from danger but also made it possible for the Islamic community to continue its existence outside Mecca. Historical sources emphasize that this migration took place in two stages and that dozens of Muslims participated in it (1). This action constituted a form of risk management through which part of the community was settled in a safe environment.

In the final years of the Meccan period, the Prophet pursued the strategy of forming a political alliance with the people of Yathrib. Meeting a group of people from Yathrib during the pilgrimage season and then the Pledge of al-'Aqaba prepared the ground for the first political alliance between the Muslims and the tribes of Aws and Khazraj.

This agreement included military and social support for the Prophet and ultimately led to the migration of Muslims to Medina (4). This action can be regarded as the most important strategy of the Prophet in exiting the Meccan crisis, because by transferring the center of the da'wa from a hostile environment to a city ready to receive it, the conditions for the formation of the Islamic state were created.

The examination of these strategies shows that the Prophet's management of the Meccan crisis was based on a set of principles: gradualism in action, strengthening identity and internal cohesion, using existing social capacities, expanding external communications, and finding an alternative base for the continuation of the movement. These principles enabled the small Muslim community to withstand severe pressures and eventually prepared the ground for a larger historical transformation. In other words, during the Meccan period, the Prophet acted not only as a religious leader but also as a capable manager under crisis conditions; through the use of diverse strategies, he was able to guide the path of the Islamic da'wa from a stage of weakness and pressure to a stage of power and the formation of a political community.

Strategic Patience and Avoidance of Direct Confrontation

Strategic patience and avoidance of direct confrontation were among the most important strategies of the Prophet of Islam in managing the crises of the Meccan period. In the early years of the Islamic da'wa, the Muslim community was weak in demographic, economic, and political terms and lacked the capacity for military confrontation or open conflict with the Quraysh power structure. Under such conditions, instead of choosing the path of direct conflict, the Prophet adopted a strategy based on active patience, restraint, and concentration on consolidating the doctrinal foundations of the nascent Islamic community. This approach not only preserved the lives of followers but also provided the necessary opportunity for the formation of the intellectual identity and social cohesion of Muslims. Historical sources show that this type of crisis management was based on an accurate understanding of Meccan social conditions and of the balance of power between Muslims and their opponents.

One important manifestation of this strategy was the avoidance of military conflict during the Meccan period. Although Muslims were repeatedly subjected to persecution, torture, and humiliation, the Prophet did not encourage them to engage in armed resistance and consistently emphasized patience and steadfastness. Many historical reports indicate that some Muslims, because of the intensity of Quraysh pressure, asked the Prophet for permission to resist, but the Prophet did not accept this request and called them to endurance. Ibn Hisham reports in his *sīra* that Muslims, in the face of tortures inflicted by Quraysh leaders such as Abu Jahl and Umayya ibn Khalaf, were only called to steadfastness and were not permitted to retaliate (1). This decision shows that the Prophet was well aware of the possible consequences of conflict, since any military confrontation under those conditions could have led to the complete destruction of the small Muslim community.

On the other hand, avoiding direct conflict allowed the Islamic da'wa to spread through cultural and intellectual channels. The Prophet focused on preaching the message of monotheism, reforming religious beliefs, and creating moral transformation in society. The Qur'anic verses revealed in Mecca primarily emphasized themes such as monotheism, resurrection, social justice, and human moral responsibility. These themes show that, at this stage, the main goal was to strengthen the intellectual and doctrinal infrastructure of the Islamic community. In his analysis of the Meccan period, Motahhari argues that during this period the Prophet paid attention above all to educating faithful and conscious individuals so that a community could be formed that would later be capable of accepting

social and political responsibilities (6). Therefore, avoiding military confrontation gave the Prophet the opportunity to devote the energy of the Islamic community to education, moral formation, and the deepening of faith.

Concentration on the consolidation of belief among Muslims was another important dimension of the Prophet's strategic patience. Meccan society was tribal and deeply attached to its religious and cultural traditions, and the acceptance of a new religion encountered strong resistance. To confront this resistance, the Prophet adopted a method of gradual instruction and the deepening of religious beliefs. Educational gatherings in the house of al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam were an example of these efforts, where Muslims gathered and learned the teachings of the Qur'an. In addition to religious instruction, these sessions played an important role in strengthening solidarity among Muslims and formed a kind of hidden social network that resisted the pressures of the Quraysh (7). This approach shows that the Prophet, rather than focusing on rapid quantitative growth in the number of followers, paid attention to the quality of their faith and the solidity of their beliefs.

From a historical perspective, the Prophet's strategic patience also prevented opponents from finding a pretext for the extensive suppression of Muslims. The Quraysh attempted to portray the Prophet as a source of disorder and a threat to the social order, but the peaceful conduct of Muslims largely neutralized this claim. When Muslims refrained from violence despite severe persecution, public opinion among some tribes began to question the conduct of the Quraysh. Al-Tabari notes in his history that this very issue led some people outside Mecca to become curious about the Islamic da'wa and to meet the Prophet during the pilgrimage season (3). Thus, Muslim restraint in practice became a kind of communicative instrument that conveyed the peaceful message of Islam to others.

From a managerial perspective, strategic patience enabled the Prophet to identify the proper time for changing circumstances. In crisis management, one of the important principles is choosing the appropriate moment for action. During the Meccan period, the Prophet knew well that the conditions for forming an independent political community had not yet emerged, and that any hasty action could endanger the future of the Islamic da'wa. Therefore, until a social base outside Mecca had been formed, he avoided direct confrontation with the Quraysh. When the necessary grounds were established in Yathrib and a group of people from that city pledged allegiance to the Prophet, the conditions for a change in strategy were created. In his analysis of this stage, Jafarian writes that the Prophet's patience in Mecca was in fact a form of long-term planning for transferring the da'wa to a more suitable environment (4).

Moreover, the concentration on consolidating belief prevented Muslims from wavering under intense social pressure. Many of them faced severe torture, such as Bilal al-Habashi, who was tortured by Umayya ibn Khalaf, and the family of Yasir, who were subjected to harsh persecution. Despite these pressures, their deep faith prevented them from returning to their former beliefs. This steadfastness shows that the Prophet's educational strategy was highly effective in strengthening religious conviction. Ibn Kathir, in reporting these events, emphasizes that the steadfastness of Muslims under torture became one of the factors in the gradual spread of Islam, because many observers were astonished by such a degree of commitment (8).

Overall, it can be said that strategic patience and avoidance of direct confrontation during the Meccan period were not a passive policy, but rather an intelligent form of crisis management adopted on the basis of an accurate understanding of social and political conditions. By avoiding military conflict, focusing on doctrinal education, and preserving the cohesion of the Muslim community, the Prophet was able to transform a pressured minority into a resilient community with a shared identity. This community was later able in Medina to play a broader political and social role and to lay the foundations of Islamic civilization. Therefore, the strategy of patience in Mecca was not a

sign of weakness, but part of a long-term program for social and religious transformation that ultimately led to the historical success of the Islamic da'wa.

Utilization of Tribal Support

Utilizing tribal support in Meccan society was one of the most important strategies of the Prophet of Islam in managing the crises of the first years of the da'wa. The social structure of Mecca in the sixth and seventh centuries CE was based on the tribal system, and the social security of individuals depended above all on their affiliation with a tribe and the protection of the tribal chief. In such a structure, if an individual lacked tribal backing, he became completely vulnerable to threats and violence. With an accurate understanding of this social structure, the Prophet of Islam used the existing capacities of the tribal system to protect the Islamic da'wa and was able to reduce the intensity of Quraysh threats to a considerable extent. The most important manifestation of this strategy can be seen in the support of Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle and the head of Banu Hashim, which played a fundamental role in preserving the Prophet's security during the Meccan period.

As the elder of Banu Hashim, Abu Talib held an important social and political position in Mecca. Although historical sources present different views regarding his belief or unbelief, there is no doubt about his practical support for the Prophet. When the Prophet's da'wa became public and the leaders of the Quraysh reacted to it, their first action was to try to persuade Abu Talib to stop the Prophet's activities. The Quraysh approached Abu Talib and asked him to prevent his nephew from criticizing idols and traditional rituals, because they regarded this as a threat to the social and economic order of Mecca. Ibn Hisham reports in his *sīra* that the leaders of the Quraysh approached Abu Talib several times and asked him to arbitrate between them and the Prophet, but despite great pressure, Abu Talib did not abandon his support (1). This support prevented the Quraysh from easily harming the Prophet.

Abu Talib's role in supporting the Prophet was not limited to verbal endorsement; rather, he used his tribal position to create a form of social shield against threats. In Arab tribal society, attacking an individual was regarded as declaring hostility against his entire tribe and could lead to widespread conflicts among tribes. For this reason, despite their intense hostility toward the Prophet, the Quraysh refrained from taking direct action to kill him, because they knew that such an action would provoke a reaction from Banu Hashim. In his historical reports, al-Tabari notes that Abu Talib repeatedly emphasized in tribal assemblies that Banu Hashim would support the Prophet and would not allow him to be harmed (3). This firm stance enabled the Prophet to continue his activity during the early years of the da'wa.

One important example of the use of the rules of the tribal system to protect the Islamic da'wa was Abu Talib's response to the direct threats of the Quraysh. When pressures on the Prophet increased, Abu Talib gathered Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib and asked them to support the Prophet. Most members of these two clans, even those who had not become Muslims, supported this decision because of tribal bonds. This tribal solidarity prevented the Quraysh from directly targeting the Prophet. In *The Beginning and the End*, Ibn Kathir writes that the unity of Banu Hashim in supporting the Prophet was one of the most important obstacles to Quraysh plans for his physical elimination (8).

As Quraysh pressures continued, they decided to place Banu Hashim under economic and social pressure by imposing a boycott. This boycott, known as the economic siege of the valley of Abu Talib, was one of the most difficult crises of the Meccan period. The Quraysh wrote a pact according to which no one had the right to trade,

marry, or maintain social relations with Banu Hashim. Their goal was to increase economic pressure and force Banu Hashim to abandon their support for the Prophet. Nevertheless, Abu Talib and the other members of the clan decided to continue supporting the Prophet despite severe hardship. This siege continued for about three years, during which Muslims and Banu Hashim faced an acute shortage of food and resources (7). Resistance against these pressures demonstrates the importance of tribal bonds in preserving the Prophet's security and sustaining the Islamic da'wa.

The Prophet's use of the tribal structure was not limited to relying solely on Abu Talib's support; rather, he was fully aware of the rules and norms of Arab society and used them to advance the aims of the da'wa. In the culture of pre-Islamic Arabia, loyalty to covenants and respect for asylum were important values. In his interaction with various tribes, the Prophet attempted to use these very values to create supportive relations. For example, during the pilgrimage season, when different Arab tribes came to Mecca, the Prophet met them and, while introducing the message of Islam, asked them to support him or at least allow him to express his message freely. These efforts ultimately led to the establishment of relations with some tribes outside Mecca, which later prepared the ground for the migration to Medina (4).

From the perspective of historical sociology, using the tribal system to protect the Islamic da'wa shows that the Prophet adopted a realistic approach toward existing social structures. Instead of directly confronting the tribal structure, he attempted to use its capacities to preserve security and gradually expand the da'wa. This approach enabled Islam in its earliest stages to advance with the least degree of military conflict and provided the necessary opportunity for doctrinal consolidation and social organization. According to some scholars of Islamic history, the tribal support of Banu Hashim created a kind of "informal political protection" for the Prophet, without which the continuation of the da'wa in Mecca would probably have been extremely difficult (7).

Abu Talib's role in this regard is especially important, because he not only supported the Prophet but also did not retreat from his position in the face of severe economic and political pressures. Many historical sources report poems attributed to Abu Talib in which he emphasized his support for the Prophet. These poems indicate that he regarded the Prophet as a truthful and trustworthy person and considered defending him to be his moral and tribal duty. This support prevented the Quraysh from implementing a serious plan to kill the Prophet during the early years of the prophetic mission (1).

However, after the death of Abu Talib, conditions became more difficult for the Prophet. The year in which Abu Talib and Khadija died became known as the "Year of Sorrow" because of the many psychological and social pressures it brought upon the Prophet. After Abu Talib's death, the Quraysh became bolder in persecuting the Prophet, because there was no longer a powerful tribal barrier standing before them. This change in circumstances shows how significant tribal support had been in preserving the Prophet's security. In his report of this period, al-Tabari notes that after Abu Talib's death, Quraysh persecution intensified and the Prophet was compelled to look beyond Mecca in search of a new base for the da'wa (3).

Creating the Social Network of Believers

Creating the social network of believers in the first years of the Islamic da'wa was one of the fundamental strategies of the Prophet of Islam for managing the difficult conditions of Mecca. Meccan society at the time of the Prophet's mission had a tribal and traditional structure and was deeply dependent on religious and economic beliefs associated with idolatry. In such an environment, the emergence of a new religious message that challenged

existing doctrinal and social structures naturally encountered strong resistance. To confront this situation, the Prophet adopted a gradual and profound strategy, one of the most important dimensions of which was educating the initial nucleus of Muslims and creating strong social bonds among them. This nascent social network gradually became a cohesive community capable of enduring the political, social, and economic pressures of the Quraysh and ultimately preparing the ground for the formation of the Islamic community in Medina.

In the first years of the prophetic mission, the Prophet began his da'wa in a limited and purposeful manner and sought to attract individuals who were morally, intellectually, and socially prepared to accept the message of monotheism. The first Muslims were generally among the Prophet's close relatives or individuals who trusted his honesty and integrity. Historical sources state that Khadija, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Zayd ibn Haritha, and Abu Bakr were among the first people to believe in the Prophet, and gradually others joined this group (9). The gradual selection of individuals and the avoidance of rapid and unplanned expansion of the da'wa show that the Prophet sought to create a firm and aware initial nucleus capable of forming the foundations of the Islamic community.

One of the most important centers for the formation of this initial nucleus was the house of al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam. This house, located near Mount Safa, became a place for the gathering of Muslims and the teaching of Islamic doctrines. In these gatherings, the Prophet recited Qur'anic verses to his followers and introduced them to the basic concepts of faith, monotheism, ethics, and social responsibility. The importance of these sessions was not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge; these gatherings also helped create a form of social solidarity among Muslims. Members of this small group felt that they were part of a new community with shared values and goals. According to some historians, the house of al-Arqam was in fact the first center of social organization for Muslims and played an important role in forming their collective identity (10).

The education of the initial nucleus of Muslims was not limited to theoretical instruction; the Prophet also sought to strengthen the moral and spiritual character of his followers. Many Qur'anic verses revealed during the Meccan period emphasized virtues such as patience, honesty, justice, and assistance to the needy. These teachings gradually created a shared ethical culture among Muslims that distinguished them from the surrounding society. According to some scholars of Islamic history, this process was a form of "religious socialization" through which individuals not only arrived at a shared belief but also adhered to a new model in their lifestyle and social relations (11).

Alongside intellectual and moral education, the Prophet paid special attention to strengthening social solidarity among his followers. The first Muslims came from different strata of Meccan society. Some, such as 'Uthman ibn 'Affan and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf, belonged to wealthy Quraysh families, while others, such as Bilal al-Habashi or 'Ammar ibn Yasir, were from the lower classes of society. In the tribal society of Mecca, class and lineage differences played an important role in social relations, but the Prophet, by emphasizing the principle of equality among believers, sought to reduce these distances. The Qur'an also emphasized that the real value of human beings depends on piety and faith, not lineage and wealth (12). This view gradually created a shared identity among Muslims that went beyond tribal ties.

Solidarity among Muslims was strengthened under conditions in which they faced severe pressure and persecution from the Quraysh. Many Muslims were tortured because of their faith or were deprived of the support of their families. Under such conditions, the social network of believers became a source of emotional and social support. Muslims attempted to support one another and preserve their morale in the face of external pressures. For example, historical sources report that Abu Bakr repeatedly purchased and freed Muslim slaves who were being

tortured (13). Such actions show that the social network of Muslims was not merely a doctrinal bond; rather, a form of practical cooperation and mutual support also emerged among them.

From a historical perspective, this social network also played an important role in the gradual spread of Islam. Many early Muslims themselves became preachers of the Islamic message and conveyed it to their friends, relatives, and fellow tribesmen. For example, it is said that the conversion of some prominent figures such as 'Uthman ibn 'Affan and Talha ibn 'Ubayd Allah occurred through the direct invitation of Abu Bakr (2). This process shows that the social network of Muslims gradually became an instrument for disseminating the Islamic da'wa and expanded its scope from a small group to a wider body of individuals.

Another important feature of this social network was the creation of a sense of collective responsibility among Muslims. The Prophet constantly emphasized that believers were responsible toward one another and should support one another in the face of difficulties and hardships. This principle later appeared in Medina in the form of broader social institutions, such as the pact of brotherhood between the Muhajirun and the Ansar, but its roots can be observed in this initial social network in Mecca (14). In fact, the experience of solidarity during the Meccan period prepared the ground for the formation of a cohesive community in Medina.

Overall, it can be said that creating the social network of believers was one of the most important achievements of the Prophet during the Meccan period. This network not only helped preserve the identity and cohesion of Muslims under conditions of pressure but also provided a foundation for the gradual spread of the Islamic da'wa. Educating the initial nucleus of Muslims, strengthening emotional and social bonds among them, and creating a sense of shared responsibility were factors that enabled the small Muslim community to resist the severe crises of Mecca. Therefore, many scholars of Islamic history believe that the later successes of Muslims in Medina were largely the result of this educational and social process during the Meccan period, because a community formed on the basis of deep faith and social solidarity has a greater capacity to confront political and social challenges.

Migration to Abyssinia as a Strategy for Crisis Reduction and the Expansion of Relations with Tribes outside Mecca

The first migration of Muslims to the land of Abyssinia in the early years of the Islamic da'wa was one of the most important strategies adopted by the Prophet of Islam to reduce the severe pressures of the Quraysh and prevent the collapse of the small Muslim population. From the earliest years, the social structure of Mecca—which was based on kinship ties, the economic power of the Quraysh elites, and the continuity of the tribal system—showed the strongest resistance to the nascent Muslim movement. The persecutions inflicted on the early Companions, ranging from physical torture such as that imposed on Bilal al-Habashi and the family of Yasir to psychological pressure and social exclusion, including trade boycotts and tribal ostracism, made the continuation of secret and semi-public Muslim activity in Mecca extremely difficult. Al-Tabari writes that the intensity of torture had reached such a level that some new believers were practically on the verge of death, and the possibility of continuing the da'wa in such an atmosphere had become highly restricted (3).

In this context, the Prophet decided to transfer a group of Muslims to a safe region; a place where they would not only be removed from Quraysh pressure but also be able to preserve their faith and social bonds without threat. The choice of Abyssinia was not accidental. On the one hand, the geographical position of this land on the opposite coast of the Red Sea made access to it easier for the migrants, and on the other hand, the character of the Negus, the king of Abyssinia, is described in Islamic sources as that of a just and benevolent ruler. Ibn Ishaq, on the basis

of early oral reports, states that before deciding on the migration, the Prophet was aware of the justice of the Negus and his support for the People of the Book, and for this reason he referred to Abyssinia as a “land of truth,” meaning a land in which no injustice would be committed against Muslims (15).

The possible collapse of the human resources of the nascent Muslim community was one of the most important concerns. A community that had not yet developed an integrated structure and depended on a small number of believers under severe pressure in Mecca would have suffered serious damage if several of them had been killed under torture or had returned to pre-Islamic beliefs out of fear of the Quraysh. The migration to Abyssinia thus played the role of “preserving human capital,” a capital that in those years constituted the most important support for the Islamic da‘wa. Al-Baladhuri notes that, in order to preserve the Companions and prevent their dispersion, the Prophet had no choice but to transfer part of them to a safe land, and this decision was able to preserve the main nucleus of believers for the following years (16). Migrants such as ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan, Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib, Ruqayya the daughter of the Prophet, and a group of prominent Companions were not only safe from Quraysh violence in Abyssinia but were also able to create new social relations and prepare themselves for the formation of a new community in the future.

Abyssinia was not merely a refuge; it became a social and political base for Muslims. Historical sources state that, with the presence of migrants in a safe land, the Quraysh felt threatened and sent two representatives, ‘Amr ibn al-‘As and ‘Abd Allah ibn Abi Rabi‘a, with many gifts to the court of the Negus in order to return the migrants (1). However, Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib, in the presence of the Negus, gave a carefully articulated defense of the nature of the Islamic da‘wa, the position of the Prophet, and the reasons for leaving Mecca. After hearing his words and the verses of Surah Maryam, the Negus placed the migrants under his official protection and rejected the request of the Quraysh (1). This event, while consolidating the security of the migrants, created for the first time a kind of external legitimacy for Muslims; that is, an official state supported them, and this strengthened their social standing.

Alongside the migration to Abyssinia, the Prophet’s effort to expand relations with tribes outside Mecca was also one of the key strategies for exiting the crisis. As the pressures of the Quraysh increased, the Prophet, instead of concentrating solely on Mecca, extended his da‘wa to a wider radius. The pilgrimage season, which was the time of the great gathering of Arab tribes, provided the best opportunity for this work. Ibn Sa‘d reports in *The Great Classes* that, toward the end of the years of da‘wa in Mecca, the Prophet met with representatives of nearly all the tribes that attended the pilgrimage season and invited them to accept Islam (2). These meetings were not merely religious invitations; they were also a search for a tribe that could accept the Prophet and his Companions and support them against the aggression of the Quraysh.

Nevertheless, accepting the Prophet was a heavy responsibility for the tribes, because the Quraysh would quickly regard any tribe that supported him as its enemy. Historical sources show that some tribes, after hearing the Prophet’s da‘wa, refused to support the Muslims because of fear of Quraysh hostility or the loss of economic interests. For example, Banu Shayban, despite praising the Prophet’s words, declared that they were not capable of confronting the Quraysh, although they were willing to protect Muslims against non-Quraysh enemies (17). This example shows how strongly the political and economic pressure of Mecca had made the search for external support difficult.

Nevertheless, the Prophet’s continued da‘wa during the pilgrimage seasons eventually prepared the ground for the most important historical transformations. In one of these seasons, a group of Khazrajites from Yathrib, who were involved in long-standing wars with the tribe of Aws and suffered from an exhausting tribal structure, met the

Prophet. After hearing the Prophet's message and seeing that the Islamic da'wa could free them from division and bloodshed, they embraced Islam and concluded an initial pledge of support. This event, which the sources refer to as the "First Pledge of al-'Aqaba," was a decisive point in the path toward the creation of the Islamic community (3). By using opportunities outside Mecca, the Prophet was able for the first time to find a real and social base that would not only receive Muslims but also be prepared to build a shared community.

In the following year, the "Second Pledge of al-'Aqaba" was concluded, during which seventy people from Yathrib pledged to defend the Prophet as they would defend their own families. This pledge was not merely a religious agreement but a political contract with a protective character, which explicitly confronted the Quraysh with a new reality: the Prophet now had supporters who were prepared to stand against his enemies. At this stage, the migration to Medina was not only a protective measure but also the first step in forming an independent government and a cohesive community. Ibn Ishaq reports that, after becoming certain that the social and security foundations in Yathrib were ready, the Prophet gave Muslims permission to migrate so that they could leave Mecca and unite in the new city (15).

In view of all these events, it becomes clear that the migration to Abyssinia and the expansion of relations with tribes outside Mecca were two complementary strategies for crisis management. The migration to Abyssinia preserved the human resources of Muslims, saved them from the danger of destruction, and provided a safe base in which they could strengthen their collective identity. On the other hand, expanding relations with tribes and using the opportunities of the pilgrimage season made it possible to find external allies and led to the formation of the Pledge of al-'Aqaba and ultimately the migration to Medina. Together, these two strategies not only prevented a possible collapse but also prepared the prerequisites for the formation of the first Islamic community, a community that quickly developed a new political and social structure in Medina and provided the necessary force for the expansion of Islam.

Conclusion:

The examination of the events of the Meccan period shows that the leadership of the Prophet of Islam at this stage was based above all on an intelligent form of crisis management; a management in which the social, cultural, and political conditions of the environment were carefully assessed, and decisions were made in such a way that, while preserving the main nucleus of the nascent Muslim community, the path for the gradual expansion of the da'wa would also remain open. Meccan society at that time had an intensely tribal structure, and economic and social power was concentrated in the hands of the leaders of the Quraysh. Such a structure naturally reacted harshly to any reformist or doctrinal movement that threatened its traditional order. In this atmosphere, the Prophet neither resorted to direct and hasty confrontation nor retreated from the path of his da'wa; rather, by adopting an approach based on strategic patience, he attempted to guide the Islamic da'wa through a highly fragile stage. This patience did not mean passivity; rather, it was a form of prudence aimed at preventing premature and costly confrontations, so that Muslims could gradually become a social force without being destroyed or dispersed.

Alongside this strategic patience, the Prophet also made use of existing social structures. In the tribal society of Mecca, kinship support and tribal position played a decisive role in the security of individuals. By relying on his tribal ties and the standing of Banu Hashim, the Prophet was able to benefit from a degree of social protection, and this prevented opponents from easily eliminating him. This use of social capacities shows that the Prophet's leadership did not rely solely on the spiritual dimensions of the da'wa, but also took into account the social realities of society

and used those very structures to advance his goals. Within this framework, communication with influential individuals and their gradual invitation to Islam were also important, because the presence of such individuals could reduce the intensity of pressures and increase the social credibility of the Muslim community. On the other hand, one of the most important achievements of the Meccan period was the creation of a human network of loyal followers. Despite pressures, torture, and severe restrictions, the first Muslims developed a deep bond with one another and with the Prophet, and this bond formed the main nucleus of the future Islamic community. This human network was based not only on shared faith but also on a form of social solidarity that played a decisive role in later stages of Islamic history. Many of those who believed during the Meccan period later became among the principal pillars of the Islamic community in Medina and played important roles in shaping its social and political institutions. Alongside these measures, the use of migration as a tactic of survival also occupied a special place in the Prophet's strategies. The migration to Abyssinia was a clear example of this approach; an action undertaken with the aim of preserving the lives of Muslims and preventing the destruction of their nascent community. This decision shows that, under crisis conditions, the Prophet did not confine himself to resistance within the place of pressure; rather, by transferring part of his followers to a safe environment, he created the possibility for the continuation of their social and religious life. Later, the same logic was repeated in the migration to Medina, but this time on a broader scale and with the aim of establishing an independent community. Therefore, migration was not merely geographical relocation; it was a strategic instrument for overcoming crisis and beginning a new stage in Islamic history.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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Transparency of Data

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