

Medina tul Ilm

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In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

There is a great debate prevalent in the Muslim World related to the 'literacy' aspect of the holy Prophet (SAW) since the Quran has referred to him as '**Ummi**'. **Some of the Muslims have the audacious view that the holy Prophet (SAW) was an 'illiterate'**- who could neither read nor write and hence Quran has referred to him as 'Ummi'. This argument loses its steam and can be proved baseless if we take pains to ponder upon the life of our beloved Prophet (SAW). **He was a successful businessman and was also referred to as 'Amin' for his honest dealings with people. The people of Mecca willingly left their belongings with him while they went out. Had the holy Prophet (SAW) been an illiterate, as claimed by some of our Muslim friends, he would not have won the people's trust with respect to their belongings. And it is equally senseless to think that a complete illiterate would run the business successfully for so many years as it is a known fact that the holy Prophet (SAW) was an efficient trader prior to the announcement of his Prophethood.**

But before we discuss this issue further, let us understand the meaning of the word 'Ummi'. As per my research the word '**Ummi**' has the following meanings:

- Unschooled and unacquainted with writing
- An inhabitant of **Umm-al-Qura**
- Arab polytheists **who were not the followers of the Book**
- As per Lughat-e-Kishwari, **Ummi is a person who is deprived of his fatherly love since he has lost his father before his own birth.**

Except the first meaning the remaining three meanings relate to the life of the holy Prophet (SAW) and there is no difference of opinion amongst the Muslim Ummah on them:

- He lived **in Mecca (Umm al Qura)**.
- He lived **amidst Arab polytheists who did not follow any book prior to Quran.**
- His 'Nazool' happened **after his father Hazrat Abdullah (as) had died.**

The difference of opinion among the various sects of Islam starts when the above-mentioned first meaning of the word 'Ummi' is taken literally by certain sections of the Ummah, and since it shows the holy Prophet (SAW) in a derogatory light it becomes worthy of logical counter arguments. Arberrry translates the expression **an-nabiyyal-ummi** as "**the Prophet of the common folk**". While some have argued **that 'Ummi' does not mean illiterate but it means scriptureless. Thus the word 'Ummi' refers to the Arab polytheists who were scriptureless prior to the Quran and the holy Prophet (SAW) brought Quran for this 'Ummah'.**

→ In the above section, in the light of available research on the word 'Ummi' we have tried to counter argue this opinion. Let us look into the Quran for further explanation on this. The Quran has praised the conduct and character of our beloved Prophet (SAW) on so many occasions that **it seems illogical that the expression of word 'Ummi' so referred by Quran is to address him as**

an illiterate. That is why it becomes mandatory for us to find out what Allah (SWT) says about the knowledge of our beloved Prophet (SAW) by pondering upon various ayahs.

We start this research by contemplating on the ayahs related to the creation of Aadam (as):

- **“Aur (Ae Rasool) uss waqt ko yaad karo jab tumhare Parwardigar ne farishton se kaha ki Main (Apna) ek nayab zameen main bananewala hoon (Farishte ta’ajjub se) kehne lage kya Tu zameen per aise shakhs ko paida karega jo zameen main fasaad aur khoonreziyan karta phire hanlanke (agar) Khalifa banana hai (to hamara zyada haq hai) kyonke hum Teri taarif wa tasbih karte hain aur teri Paakizgi saabit karte hain tab Khuda ne farmaya issmain to shak hi nahin ki jo Main jaanta hoon tum nahin jaante.”** – (Surah-e-Baqra, ayah 30)

“Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? - whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not.” – (Surah-e-Baqra, ayah 30)

The above ayah refers to the incident of creation of Aadam (as) where the angels showed initial reluctance in accepting the supremacy of Aadam (as). They argued that they were more worthy of vicegerency since they had praised and glorified the Almighty.

- **“Aur Aadam ko sab cheezon ke naam sikhadiye phir unko farishton ke saamne pesh kiya aur farmaya ki agar tum apne daawe main ke - hum mustahaqe khilafat hain – sachhe ho to Mujhe inn cheezon ke naam batao.”** – (Surah-e-Baqra, ayah 31)

“(And He taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful)”.

Seeing their reluctance Allah (SWT) imparted the knowledge of specific names to Aadam (as) and challenged the angels to inform Him with the same names if they were truthful in regard to their claim for vicegerency.

- **“(Uss waqt Khuda ne Aadam ko) hukm diya ke Ae Aadam tum inn farishton ko unn sab cheezon ke naam bata do bas jab Aadam ne farishton ko unn cheezon ke naam bata diye to Khuda ne farishton ki taraf khitaab kar ke farmaya: kyon, Main tum se na kehta tha ke Main aasmanon aur zameenon ke chhipe hue raaz ko jaanta hoon, aur jo kuch tum ab zaahir karte ho aur jo kuch tum chhipate the (wo sab) jaanta hoon.”** – (Surah-e-Baqra, ayah 33)

“(He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names, and when he had informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the earth? And I know that which ye disclose and which ye hide.)”

And when the angels could not reveal the names as asked by Allah (SWT) and accepted their limitation of not knowing anything beyond what Allah (SWT) has taught them, Allah (SWT) asked Aadam (as) to inform them with those names and thus proved his supremacy. The angels then bowed down in ‘*sajda*’ in front of Aadam (as) and accepted his supremacy and vicegerency above them. *Iblis* refused to do so and hence he became ‘Satan’.

→ A strong parallel can be drawn from the above incident of **Aadam (as)’s vicegerency with the supremacy of the holy Prophet (SAW)** if we properly analyze the above sequence of events. But before doing this let us once again summarize the above-mentioned incident for our better understanding:

Allah (SWT) informed the angels that He is going to create His vicegerent. Initially there was reluctance from the angels and they argued that they were worthier for the position due their years of glorification and praise of Allah (SWT). **Allah (SWT) did not mind their argument and did not punish them for their reluctance.** Instead He imparted the knowledge of certain names to Aadam (as) and proved that **Aadam (as) was worthier of vicegerency because of this knowledge.** But even after proving this *Iblis* still remained unmoved and did not accept the supremacy of Aadam (as) and **hence he was rejected and became a ‘Satan’.**

⇒ The result which I am trying to derive from the above sequence of events is that **Allah (SWT) might forgive the initial mistake of disobeying Him the way the angels were forgiven for their reluctance of accepting Aadam (as)’s supremacy but by punishing Iblis-The Satan** Allah (SWT) has conveyed that **He would not forgive those who keep on disobeying His Prophets and speak ill about them after Allah (SWT) has already established their supremacy.**

The above result needs to be kept in mind while we move to the ayahs that relate with the holy Prophet (SAW) and once we have analyzed the ayahs we would link them with the above results.

- “(Aur Ae Rasool (SAW)) **iss se pehle na to tum koi kitab hi padhte the aur na apne haath se tum likha karte the aisa hota to ye jhoothi zaroor tumhari nabuwwat main shak karte.**” – (Surah-e-Ankabut, ayah 48)

“(You were **neither reading any book before this, nor did you write one down** with your hand. If you had done so, the followers of falsehood would have had cause to doubt it.)”

Allah (SWT), in the above ayah, has addressed the holy Prophet (SAW) saying that he did not read or write **any book before this**. Here the phrase ‘**before this**’ (قَبْلَهُ) refers to **The Quran** and hence it can be read as ‘**before Quran**’ the holy Prophet (SAW) ‘**did not read or write**’ any other ‘**Similar Book**’. The explanation can be simplified further that **before Quran the holy Prophet (SAW) did not read or write any other ‘Scripture’.** The ayah can now be explained that **if the Kafirs had seen the Prophet (SAW) reading or writing ‘Scriptures’ before the revelation of Quran they would have doubted the credibility of Quran as being written down by the holy Prophet (SAW) himself rather than it being a Divine Commandment. No where does this ayah or the Quran say that he did not ‘know’ how to read or write.**

The above inference can be further substantiated by the following ayahs from Surah-e-Al Alaq:

- “(Ae Rasool (SAW)) Apne **Parwardigar ka naam lekar padho jisne (har cheez ko) paida kiya, Uss ne insaan ko jame hue khoon se paida kiya, Padho aur tumhara Parwardigar bada Karim hai jisne kalam ke zariye taalim di** Ussine insaan ko wo baatein bataayee jinko wo kuch jaanta hi na tha.” – (Surah-e-Al Alaq, ayah 1-5)

*(“**Read in the name of your Lord Who created. He created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is Most Honorable, Who taught (to write) with the pen** Taught man what he knew not.”)*

In the above ayahs, which need no further explanation, it can be clearly seen that Jibraeel (as) addresses the holy Prophet (SAW) asking him to **‘read’** whatever has been revealed to him.

We now move to the ayahs that explain the revelation of Quran:

- “(Aur Ae Rasool (SAW)) **beshak yeh (Quran) saari Khudai ke paalne wale (Khuda) ka utara hua hai jise Rook al amin (Jibraeel (A.S)) saaf Arabi zabaan main lekar tumhare dil per naazil hue hain taake tum bhi aur paighambaron ki tarah logon ko azab e Khuda se darao.**” – (Surah-e-Shaura, ayah 192-195)

*(“**And indeed this Qur’an has been sent down by the Lord Of The Creation. The Trustworthy Spirit (Jibraeel (A.S)) brought it down. Upon your heart, for you to convey warning. In plain Arabic language.**)*

The holy Quran was sent down by the Almighty Allah on the heart of our beloved Prophet (SAW) through the arch angel *Jibraeel (as)*. Thus **Allah (SWT) is the only tutor who mentored the holy Prophet (SAW)** and He had appointed *Jibraeel (as)* as the carrier of His Divine Messages to the holy Prophet (SAW). This can be further explained in the light of following ayahs:

- “**Qasam hai sitare ki jis waqt ke woh utra. Tumhara rafeeq na bhatak gaya hai aur na behka hai. Aur wo khwahishe nafasani se kuch nahin kehta. Jo kuch woh kehta hai woh nahin hai magar Wahi hai jo uski taraf bheji jaati hai. Usko badi quwwaton waale aur badi aqal waale ne taalim kiya.**” - (Surah-e-Najam, ayah,1-5)

*(“**I swear by the star when it goes down. Your companion does not err, nor does he go astray; Nor does he speak out of desire. It is naught but revelation that is revealed, The Lord of Mighty Power has taught him**”)*

The ayah says that **The Almighty Allah has taught the Prophet (SAW)** in such a manner that **never can he make any error and nor can he go astray.** Here **Almighty Allah is the teacher**

and the Prophet (SAW), His worthy student who does **not speak anything out of his own desire but only that which Allah (SWT) wishes him to speak.**

→ Analyzing the ayahs in the above-mentioned sequence we can infer that the **world had never seen the holy Prophet (SAW) either read or write any other scripture for 40 years till the Quranic revelations started. The Quran was revealed on the heart of the holy Prophet (SAW) by arch angel Jibraeel (as) on the Command of Allah (SWT). Allah (SWT) mentored the holy Prophet with such perfection that he would neither go astray nor could he commit errors. Thus he was a worthy student of none less than the Almighty Allah.**

⇒ The above result **confirms the perfection of the holy Prophet (SAW) and his supremacy over every other creation of the Almighty Allah.** Before the revelation of Quran had somebody doubted his perfection and knowledge Allah might have forgiven him the way He had forgiven the initial reluctance of the angels to accept the supremacy of Aadam (as). But **if somebody doubts the knowledge and literacy of our beloved Prophet (SAW) after the Quran was revealed to him, he might never be forgiven and might get a fate similar to Satan.** This is because **a person who doubts the knowledge and literacy of holy Prophet (SAW) is actually challenging the words of Allah (SWT)** since Almighty Allah has mentored and tutored the holy Prophet (SAW).

After the holy Prophet (SAW), Ibrahim (as) holds prominent position in the history of Islam. Centuries before the birth of the Prophet Mohammed (SAW), it was the efforts of Ibrahim (as) along with his son Ismail (as) which reformed Mecca. They raised the plinth of *Ka'aba* – The House of Allah (SWT) and in return Allah (SWT) acknowledged their services by referring to Islam as **“Millat-e-Ibrahim”**. Hence let us mention the prayers he made for the people of Mecca while raising the plinth of *Ka'aba*:

- *“(Aur) Ae Hamare Paalnewale Makke walon main unhin main se **ek Rasool ko bhej jo unko teri aayatein padhkar sunaye aur Aasmani Kitab aur aql ki baatein sikhaye aur un (unke nafs) ko pakeezah kar de** beshak Tu hi Ghalib aur Sahib-e-tadbir hai.”* – (Surah-e-Baqra, ayah 129)

*“(And send to them, O Lord, an apostle from among them **to impart Your messages to them, and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and correct them in every way; for indeed You are mighty and wise.**)”*

Ibrahim (as) prayed to Allah (SWT) to send an apostle for the people of Mecca to further reform them by imparting them with the knowledge and wisdom of the Divine Book. His prayer was answered by Allah (SWT) in the following manner:

- *“Humne tum main tum hi main ka **ek Rasool bheja jo tumko Hamari aayatein Padhkar sunaye aur tumhare nafs ko pakeezah kare** aur **tumhain kitab (Quran) ki baatein***

sikhaye aur tum ko woh baatein bataye jin ki tumhain pehle se khabar bhi na thi.” –
(Surah-e-Baqra, ayah 151)

“(Even as **We sent a messenger from among you to convey Our messages to you and cleanse you, and teach you the Book and the wisdom, and what you did not know**)”

With the birth of the holy Prophet (SAW), Allah (SWT) fulfilled the prayers of Ibrahim (as). It was the efforts of our beloved Prophet (SAW) which reformed the Arab world. He conveyed the Commandments, cleansed their soul, taught them the lessons of Divine Book and imparted wisdom.

→ The holy Quran has confirmed in the above ayahs that our beloved Prophet (SAW) was not an illiterate - as wrongly claimed by some, but **in fact he was the greatest reformer to have ever graced this earth.** After having known this, if someone still claims that the Prophet Mohammed (SAW) was an illiterate **he is guilty of denying the fulfillment of prayers of Ibrahim (as) and opposing Quran and its Commandments.**

With our efforts we have negated the false claims by certain sections of *Ummah* on the literacy aspect of our beloved Prophet (SAW). We have also seen and understood what Quran has to say about his knowledge and wisdom. It is not possible to discuss his profound knowledge but let us now try to understand the magnitude of his knowledge in the light of Quran.

When we assign some work to someone in our day to day life we ensure that the person is capable enough to take the responsibility. If we are so concerned in our mundane work, Allah (SWT) must have been more concerned while appointing the holy Prophet (SAW) as His most revered Messenger. So let us see what measures Allah (SWT) took while appointing the holy Prophet (SAW) as His Apostle:

- “(Ae Rasool) ***kya Humne tumhara sina (ilm se) kushada nahin kar diya*** – (Surah-e-Ash Sharh, ayah 1)

“(Have we not ***expanded your bosom (with knowledge)***)”

Allah (SWT) imparted His Divine Knowledge to our beloved Prophet (SAW) by expanding his bosom. Could the Divine Knowledge so given to the Prophet have any limits?

- ***Aur Khuda hi ne to tum per apni kitab aur hikmat naazil ki aur jo baatein tum nahin jaante the tumhain sikha di aur tum per to Khuda ka bada fazal hai*** - (Surah-e-Nisa, ayah 113)

“(And Allah has revealed to you the Book and the wisdom, and **He has taught you what you did not know,** and Allah's grace on you is very great.)”

The above ayah claims that Allah (SWT) revealed **the knowledge of all those things that the holy Prophet (SAW) did not know**. The holy Prophet (SAW) is Allah's greatest Prophet and best of creations on this earth and hence he **must have been given the greatest knowledge that nobody prior to him got**. Does it mean Allah (SWT) acquainted the Prophet (SAW) with the '**Unseen**'?

- “(Munafiqo) Khuda aisa nahin hai ke boore bhale ki tameez kiye baghair jis haalat par tum ho ussi haalat par mominon ko bhi chhod de aur Khuda aisa bhi nahin hai ke tumhain ghaib ki baatein bata de magar (haan) **Khuda apne rasoolon main jise chahta hai (ghaib batane ke waaste) chun leta hai** pas Khuda aur uss ke rasoolon per imaan lao.” – (Surah-e-Aale Imran, ayah 179)

“(On no account will Allah leave the believers in the condition which you are in until He separates the evil from the good; nor is Allah going to make you **acquainted with the unseen, but Allah chooses of His apostles whom He pleases**; therefore believe in Allah and His Apostle)”

The ayah says that Allah (SWT) does not acquaint the hypocrites with the knowledge of unseen, but it further adds by saying that Allah (SWT) does acquaint **His chosen Apostles with the unseen. This means that there were Prophets who had the acquaintance with the knowledge of 'Unseen'**. Quran has quoted the incident of Khizr (as) foreseeing what was going to happen while Musa (as) could not. For Khizr (as) Quran has said that he was bestowed upon with a small part of '**Ilm-e-Ladunni**' and **some part of Allah's Mercy** and hence he could foresee the future.

Every Islamic sect in unison believes that our holy Prophet (SAW) is the leader of every Prophet. He is '**Sarwar-e-Ambiya**' and '**Imamul Mursalin**'. Quran also says that he is '**Rehmat-al-lil-aalamin**' (Mercy to the worlds). Our reasoning says that if Khizr (as) with a part of Allah's Mercy and small part of '**Ilm-e-Ladunni**' can get acquainted with the unseen, **the holy Prophet (SAW) being 'Mercy to the Worlds' and 'tutored by Allah (SWT) Himself' would not have a larger magnitude of Divine Knowledge and greater acquaintance with the 'unseen' than any other Prophet?**

→ With this result the debate of the holy Prophet (SAW) being literate or not becomes irrelevant. In conclusion we may summarize that Allah (SWT) **appointed the holy Prophet (SAW) as His worthy Messenger by expanding his bosom with the knowledge** of all those things which the Prophet (SAW) did not know. Even **made him acquainted with the knowledge of unseen** and **perfected him** such that he neither erred nor made any errors and with this Allah (SWT) made him the leader of Prophets and His most revered Apostle.

Allah (SWT) guided the holy Prophet (SAW) so that the '**Ummah**' gets benefited by his presence. But what would happen after him? The holy Prophet (SAW) was a worthy inheritor of

Allah's Knowledge and the successor after him should be equally capable to imbibe the legacy and hence the holy Prophet (SAW) chose Mawla Ali (as) as his successor to this Divine Legacy:

The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said: "O Ali! You are the owner of my stream (Al-Hawd), the holder of my banner, my beloved, my custodian, **the inheritor of my knowledge, my successor and the holder of the prophets' inheritances before me. You are the guardian of Allah in His land, the argument of Allah for His creations, the basis of faith and the pillar of Islam. You are the Light in darkness, the guiding light and the raised flag for the people of this world.** O Ali! He who follows you shall be saved and who leaves you shall be doomed. **You are the apparent path and the right way (Al-Sirat).** You are the leader of those who shine with light and the King of believers.

(Ref: Amali Al-Sadouq p.382, Al-Bihar vol.38 p.100, Ghayat Al-Maram vol.3 p.78, Bisharat Al-Mostafa p.95, Al-Bihar vol.40 p.53, Yanabe'a Al-Mawadda vol.1 p.39)

➔ Mawla Ali (as) is the successor of the Divine Legacy and appointed guide over 'Ummah'. If we wish to understand the Commandments of Quran, the Legacy of the holy Prophet (SAW) and ideology of Islam and if we wish to remain on the straight path we need to follow the guidance of Mawla Ali (as) and the 11 Imams from his lineage and that is why the holy Prophet (SAW) has said that:

(Ana Madinatul-ilm wa Aliyun babuha; Fa-man arada'l-ilm fal-ya til-bab).

I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate; so whoever desires knowledge, let him enter the gate.

(Ref: Nisaburi, Mustadrak, p. 929, no. 4694 cited in Reza Shah-Kazemi – Justice and Remembrance – Introducing the Spirituality of Imam Ali.)