

# The Story of Sakina

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Like the Fall in Eden, Islam has had several falls further from the grace of concord into the division of conflict and conquest - cursing al-Lat, the satanic verses, embracing jihad, women only half the value of men, the genocide at Medina, sakina subsumed to takiya, faking peace, the killing of Sarah on Muhammad's victorious entry into Mecca the cutting out the tongues of the singers and the debasing of the women at the dhu-al-Kalasa.

Muhammad was the partner of a strong independent mature woman, Khadja, who shaped his destiny as a benefactress. When Muhammad became a prophet of Islam, he did so in the tradition of the Hebrew God. At first his teachings found a degree of favour with the people in Mecca, but when he turned against the daughters of al-Llah, al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat, who were popular in Mecca and had prominent pilgrimage centres in the environs, decrying them as false icons, a division ensued which caused the Umma to have to flee to Medina, where his beloved partner and benefactress

Khadja died as a result of the privations suffered.

## *The Satanic Verses*

The historians Ibn Sa'd and Tabari (who quotes two versions) mention the satanic verses. In one the prophet is approached by Qur'ash to make a deal and persuaded to utter the verses in return for promise of admission to Mecca's inner circles. In the other, the

prophet genuinely tries to find a place for the goddesses without compromising his monotheism.

"When the apostle saw that his people had turned their backs on him and he was pained by their estrangement from what he brought them from God, he longed that there should come to him from God a message that would reconcile his people to him. One day, Tabari says, while he was meditating in the Ka'aba, the answer seemed to come in a revelation that gave a place to the three 'goddesses' without compromising his monotheistic vision"<sup>1</sup>. See also Guillaume<sup>2</sup>

*"Have you then considered the Lat and the Uzza,  
And Manat, the third, the last?  
these are the exalted birds [gharaniq]  
whose intercession is approved" (53.19)*

According to this version of the story, the Quraysh were delighted with the new revelation, which in al-Kalbi's words<sup>3</sup> was the traditional invocation made by the Qura'sh to the goddesses as they circumambulated the Ka'aba.

When the Quraysh heard that, they rejoiced and were happy and delighted at the way in which he spoke of their gods, and they listened to him, while the Muslims, having complete trust in their Prophet in respect of the messages which he brought from God, did not suspect him of error, illusion or mistake. When he came to the prostration, having completed the Surah, he prostrated himself, the Muslims did likewise, following their Prophet, trusting in the message which he had brought and following his example. Those polytheists of the Quraysh and others who were in the mosque likewise prostrated themselves because of the reference to their gods which they had heard, so that there was no one in the mosque, believer or unbeliever, who did not prostrate himself.<sup>4</sup>

*"The gharaniq were probably Numidian cranes which were thought to fly higher than any other bird. Muhammad, may have believed in the existence of the banat - al-Llah as he believed in the existence of angels and jinn, was giving the 'goddesses' a delicate*

*compliment, without compromising his message. ... The Quraysh spread the good news throughout the city: 'Muhammad has spoken of our gods in splendid fashion. He alleged in what he recited that they are the exalted gharaniq whose intercession is approved'<sup>5</sup>.*

Muhammad later removed these verses because he was later told by Gabriel they were "Satan inspired". The rejection of the Manat led to the historic conflict with the Qur'ash which resulted in the flight to Medina.

*"Have you then considered the Lat and the Uzza,  
And Manat, the third, the last?  
What! for you the males and for Him the females!  
This indeed is an unjust division!  
They are naught but names which you have named,  
you and your fathers;  
Allah has not sent for them any authority.  
They follow naught but conjecture and their low desires." (53.19)*

Muhammad then mounted a singular rejection of the daughters of al-Lah. Muhammad was offered a pact of mutual religious toleration between Allah and Allat which was entirely in keeping with the holy place it was: "the Muslims could go on worshiping al-Lillah in their religion, and the others could go on worshipping al-Lat al-Uzza and Manat. In response Muhammad recited the Sura of Rejection:

*"Say O unbelievers, I serve not what you serve  
and you are not serving what I serve,  
Nor am I serving what you have served.  
To you your religion and to me my religion!" (109)*

The attitude of the other side is frankly portrayed by Muhammad: 23.24 "And the chiefs of those who disbelieved from among his people said: 'He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves who desires that he may have superiority over you, and if Allah had pleased, He could certainly have sent down angels. We have not heard of this among our fathers of yore: He is naught but a man bedevilled.' "

Circumstances became steadily worse. A ban was imposed which led to much hardship. Khadja died. Muhammad was asked a

difficult question by Abu Lahab: "Would Muhammad's father have gone to hell because he was a pagan?"<sup>6</sup>. Muhammad ended up having to retreat to Medina. It is significant that of the pilgrims to Mecca from Medina in 622, 73 of the men, but only 3 of the women were followers of the Prophet<sup>7</sup>. Although at first praying to Jerusalem. in the face of derision of his religion by Jews in Medina, Muhammad turned the tables to Mecca as the spiritual power spot.

## *The Genocide at Medina*

The result of the falling out with the Quraysh of Mecca was a war which resulted in the genocide in the souk of Medina. The Meccan army had besieged the oasis of Medina and all but penetrated the defences. The Jews of the Oasis had made diplomatic initiatives to the Quraysh but had not actually opened their gates. In the event, the Meccan army left superstitiously after a storm brewed and Muhammad then turned his attention to the Jewish tribe. Muhammad passed a poisoned chalice, appointing a mortally wounded warrior as judge over their fates, who summarily ordered that the men be executed following Deuteronomic law and the wives and children taken into slavery. Some 700 Jewish men were summarily beheaded in the souk.

The following passage from "Muhammad" by Karen Armstrong<sup>8</sup> outlines the history: This is a grim and horrible story and has hideous overtones for most of us today.

Huyay had joined Qurayzah in their quarters after the Quraysh and the confederates had left Medina, as he had promised. When they heard that Muhammad was advancing on their territory, the Qurayzah duly barricaded themselves into their fortress and managed to hold out against the Muslims for twenty-five days. They knew that as unfaithful allies they could expect no mercy, and Huyay and Ka'b seem to have urged them to accept the inevitable. They put three possibilities before their people: they could either submit to Muhammad unconditionally (his extraordinary success argued that he might be a true prophet); or they could kill their

women and children and attack the Muslim army: if they died they would not have to worry about their dependants and if they won they could easily find new wives; or they could take Muhammad unawares by attacking him on their Sabbath, when he would not be expecting them to act. The Jews rejected all these options and asked Muhammad to let them leave the oasis on the same terms as the Bani Nadir. Muhammad refused: Nadir had proved to be even more dangerous to the umma after it had left Medina, so this time he was determined to exact total surrender. He allowed Qurayzah to consult one of their former allies: Abu Lubabah ibn Abd al-Mundhir, the chief of Auf. This part of the story is obscure. The Jews are said to have asked Abu Lubabah what Muhammad intended to do and he touched his throat, tacitly telling them that they had been sentenced to death. He was then so overcome by remorse that he bound himself to a pillar of the mosque for fifteen days until Muhammad released him. If he had told the Jews of their fate in this way, it does not seem to have affected their decision, so it has been suggested that he had perhaps indicated that he would honour his old allegiance to Qurayzah. The next day, the Qurayzah agreed to accept Muhammad's judgement and opened their gates to the Muslim army, presumably trusting in the support of their former confederates in the tribe of Aws. Indeed, the Aws begged Muhammad to be merciful; had he not granted the Bani Qaynuqa their lives at the request of Ibn Ubbay, a Khasrajite? Muhammad asked them if they would accept the decision of one of their own leading men and they agreed. During the siege, Sa'd ibn Muadh had received a fatal wound, but he was carried to the territory of Qurayzah on a donkey. His fellow chiefs urged him to spare their former allies, but Sa'd would have realised that this could be the thin end of the wedge that would bring chaos back to Medina. Should an old loyalty take precedence over commitment to the umma? Sa'd judged that all the 700 men should be killed, their wives and children sold into slavery and their property divided among the Muslims. Muhammad cried aloud: 'You have judged according to the very sentence of ai-Llah above the seven skies! The next day Muhammad ordered another trench to be dug, this time in the souk of Medina. Some individuals were spared at the request of the Muslims, but the rest were tied together in groups

and beheaded; their bodies were thrown into the trench.

Only one woman was executed, for throwing a millstone on one of the Muslims during the siege of the tribe. Aisha remembered her vividly: *"She was actually with me and was talking with me and laughing immoderately as the apostle was killing her men in the market when suddenly an unseen voice called her name. 'Good heavens,' I cried, 'what is the matter?' 'I am to be killed,' she replied. 'What for?' I asked. 'Because of something I did,' she answered. She was taken away and beheaded. Aisha used to say, I shall never forget my wonder at her good spirits and her loud laughter when all the time she knew that she would be killed"*.

It is probably impossible for us to dissociate this story from Nazi atrocities and it will inevitably alienate many people irrevocably from Muhammad. But Western scholars like Maxime Rodinson and W. Montgomery Watt argue that it is not correct to judge the incident by twentieth-century standards. This was a very primitive society - far more primitive than the Jewish society in which Jesus had lived and promulgated his gospel of mercy and love some 600 years earlier.

## *The Peace of Sakina*

Yet this genocide proved entirely unnecessary, because when Muhammad proceeded to make a bid to join the Hajj with a large unarmed group of followers, and the opposing Meccan warriors were too strong to resist, so ostensibly in the Quran, heeding the Sakina or spirit of tranquility, he sued for peace and established a peace treaty at Hudaibiyah. Karen Armstrong<sup>9</sup> notes that the Sakina appears to be a manifestation of the Shekhinah, known to Muhammad from Jewish folk lore, along with many of the other tales from targum and midrash in the Qur'an.

*"The sakina it will also be recalled, seems to be related to the Hebrew Shekhinah, the term for God's presence in the world".*

The Shekhinah is commonly referred to as the indwelling feminine face of God manifest on Earth in matrimonial concord, which retreated in the Fall, and will return as scattered shards or 'sparks' in the final unveiling.

Thus having rejected the iconic feminine in following the Hebrew view of God, the prophet found himself face to face with the abstract feminine in the form of the Sakina.

*"He it is Who sent down the Sakina  
into the hearts of the believers  
that they might add faith unto their faith" (48:4)*

## ***Smashing Idols and Cutting Tongues***

However from here, we once again see the Sakina retreat. The peace treaty was used simply as a bid to bide for time, until the Umma were numerous enough to overwhelm Mecca, and later, using pretexts of skirmishes with some outlying supporters of Mecca, in Karen Armstrong's words "handing Muhammad the perfect excuse", the treaty was abrogated and Muhammad arrived victorious in Mecca, immediately destroying all the idols, except for an image of Jesus and Mary. Thus sakina was corrupted by another concept, *takiya*, meaning the right to fake peace so that you can defeat your enemy when you are stronger. Despite the healing mercy of the Sakina, which the prophet acknowledged in the Qur'an, little heed was paid to Sakina when the prophet entered Mecca in victory without the need for battle.

Nawal el Sadaawi in "The Naked Face of Eve" notes that Sarah the slave singer who had sung barbed words in opposition to the prophet was summarily put to death on the day of Muhammad's victorious entry into Mecca, and other female singers had their tongues cut out, and those who beat the tambourine had their hands cut off. Thus all dissent was repressed by murder and

maiming.

*"Sarah was a famous slave singer who aimed her barbed words against the Moslems. She was among those whom Mahomet ordered to be executed on the day of his victorious entry into Mecca. In the region of El Nagir, it was recounted that some women had rejoiced when the Prophet died and Abu Bake, the first of the Caliphs, ordered their hands and feet to be cut off. Thus women who dared to give voice to their protest or opposition could be exposed to cruel punishment. Their hands might be cut off, or their teeth pulled out, or their tongues torn from their mouths. This last form of punishment was usually reserved for those who were singers. It was said of these women that they used to dye their hands with henna, brazenly display the seductions of their beauty, and beat time with their fingers on tambourines and drums in defiance of God, and in derision towards the rights of God and his Prophet. It was therefore necessary to cut off their hands and tear out their tongues".<sup>10</sup>.*

As time passed, Muhammad came to gather nine wives, partly as a result of cementing astute liasons. According to Wiebke Walther in "Women in Islam" the requirement for the prophet's wives to be veiled originated, according to a ninth century historian, from the prophet's marriage feast to Zaynab, the former wife of his adopted son, having been attracted to her after seeing her in her undergarments. Towards the end of the evening, when the guests showed no signs of leaving, presumably as a result of her attractiveness, the prophet 'impatiently' left the room several times and it is said the verses of 33.59 covering the women were then revealed to him.

He then legislated that women were only half the value and legitimacy in law of a man. Aisha, his child bride, who was only nine when they were wed, lamented the inferior position of women: 'The things which annul the prayers were mentioned before me. They said, "Prayer is annulled by a dog, a donkey and a woman (if they pass in front of the praying people)." I said, "You have made us (i.e. women) dogs" (Abu Said Al-Khudri)'

Nabih Faris<sup>11</sup>. notes that when the banu-Umahmah were slaughtered and the women raped for defending dhu-al-Khalasah which stood half way to San'a, a woman cried:

*"The banu-Umamah, each wielding his spear,  
Were slaughtered at al-Waliyah, their abode;  
They came to defend their shrine only to find  
Lions with brandished swords clamouring for blood.  
The women of Khath'am were then humiliated  
by the men of Ahmas and debased".*

It is thus said by al-Bukhari that the Prophet lamented: "This world shall not pass away until the buttocks of the women of Daws wiggle [again] around the dhu-al-Khalasah and they worship it as they were want to do [before Islam]"<sup>12</sup>.

Sakina is the feminine spirit which the prophet almost came into a fateful meeting with, but lost intimate contact with again in abrogating the peace treaty and in the killing of Sarah and the repression of women to be only half the value of men.

In Muslim apocalyptic vision, the world is divided between Domain of Islam or submission, and the Domain of War - Dar al-Harb - invoking a utopian agenda of world conquest. Sakina is the missing peace in the puzzle, healing jihad so that the world can become whole and complete. Sakina is the mirror of holy peace to the unholy condition of war, and the spirit of liberation for Muslim women, and men too, integral to Islamic destiny and to the soul-searching all must face to understand the roots of their beliefs.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>. Armstrong Karen 1993 "Muhammad" Victor Gollancz Ltd. p 113
- <sup>2</sup>. Guillaume A (trans, ed) The Life of Muhammad: A translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah 1955
- <sup>3</sup>. Faris Nabih 1952 (trans) al-Kabali "The Book of Idols" Princeton Univ. Pr. p 17
- <sup>4</sup>. Watt & McDonald, The History of al-Tabari, 108-109.
- <sup>5</sup>. Armstrong Karen 1993 "Muhammad" Victor Gollancz Ltd. p 114
- <sup>6</sup>. Armstrong Karen 1993 "Muhammad" Victor Gollancz Ltd. p 136
- <sup>7</sup>. Armstrong Karen 1993 "Muhammad" Victor Gollancz Ltd. p 149
- <sup>8</sup>. Armstrong Karen 1993 "Muhammad" p 206

- [9.](#) Armstrong Karen 1993 "Muhammad" Victor Gollancz Ltd. p 224
- [10.](#) El Sadaawi Nawal 1980 "The Naked Face of Eve" Beacon Press, Boston
- [11.](#) Faris Nabih 1952 (trans) al-Kabali "The Book of Idols" Princeton Univ. Pr. p 31
- [12.](#) Faris Nabih 1952 (trans) al-Kabali "The Book of Idols" Princeton Univ. Pr. p 32