

THE MIRACLE OF THE POISONED SHEEP

By Imam Raouf Zaman

In an e-mail, someone who claims to be a Roman Catholic challenged me to prove that the Prophet, peace be on him, was a true prophet. He cited some hadiths of the Prophet's being poisoned by a Jewess and argued that they show that he was not. We exchanged emails for weeks. I am making this available to the public so that every Muslim can be aware of such attacks and equip himself with the appropriate answers.

Apparently he is not aware that the official Roman Catholic position for many years has been not to challenge but to engage in constructive dialogue with other religions.

However, since he cited the incident of the poisoned sheep, which took place after the Battle of Khaybar, I responded with the facts below to show that the incident contains several miracles and at the same proves the truthfulness of the Prophet, peace be on him.

There are a number of hadiths on the poisoning incident but here are the ones he quoted.

1. Narrated Abu Hurairah:

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would accept a present, but would not accept alms (sadaqah). And Wahb bin Baqiyyah narrated to us, elsewhere, from Khalid, from Muhammad ibn Amr said on the authority of Abu Salamah, and he did not mention the name of Abu Hurairah: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to accept presents but not alms (sadaqah).

This version adds: So a Jewess presented him at Khaybar with a roasted sheep which she had poisoned. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) ate of it and the people also ate.

He then said: Take away your hands (from the food), for it has informed me that it is poisoned. Bishr ibn al-Bara' ibn Ma'rur al-Ansari died.

So he (the Prophet) sent for the Jewess (and said to her): What motivated you to do the work you have done?

She said: If you were a prophet, it would not harm you; but if you were a king, I should rid the people of you. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) then ordered regarding her and she was killed. He then said about the pain of which he died: I continued to feel pain from the morsel which I had eaten at Khaybar. This is the time when it has cut off my aorta.

Sunan Abi Dawud and Al Albani graded it as Hasan Sahih.

2. Narrated Sa`d:

I heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) saying, "Whoever takes seven 'Ajwa dates in the morning will not be effected by magic or poison on that day."

Sahih al-Bukhari

3. Narrated `Aisha:

The Prophet (ﷺ) in his ailment in which he died, used to say, "O `Aisha! I still feel the pain caused by the food I ate at Khaibar, and at this time, I feel as if my aorta is being cut from that poison."

Sahih al-Bukhari

Below are my answers to his questions.

The poisoning incident in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him, contains in it more than one amazing miracle, all proofs of his prophethood, contrary to the claim of his detractors. Let's examine the logical conclusions from all the reports.

Bear in mind that the incident took place right after the Battle of Khaybar in the second month of 7 AH, corresponding to 629 CE. The Prophet died a full four years after that, in the third month of 11AH.

My friend, you asked:

Why did the food "speak" to Muhammad AFTER and not BEFORE taking a bite?

Answer: it would still leave room open for doubt about his truthfulness. The reason for its speaking was not just to protect him and the Muslims, it was to prove that he was a true prophet. And it does just that.

Had he announced before eating that it was poisoned, then nobody would have eaten from it and Bishr would not have died. There would be no proof that it was poisoned except his word. There were no means available in those days to chemically test the food for poison.

If he had said, before eating, that it was poisoned, his modern critics would be saying that he accused the woman without proof and that he was not divinely informed.

Would he have forced the woman to eat it herself or forced any of the Jews to eat it to prove that it was not poisoned? No, he would not, as this was not his character.

Military leaders and kings always had someone taste the food before they ate. They may not even have accepted food from the enemy. But the prophet did not act as a king or a worldly leader. He showed the loftiness of his character and his status of a true prophet by accepting the food and eating from it. He wanted to show that he was willing to trust the Jews after the battle of Khaybar hoping that, perhaps, they will be guided.

He did not act upon suspicion, even with the enemy. Yet, by eating, he did not show any lack of wisdom. Showing suspicions without proof is not the way to build a relationship. His eating from

someone who may want to poison him shows his reliance on Allah to protect him. If Allah wanted him to die then no-one could keep him alive.

Bishr died after the Prophet proclaimed that it was poisoned, not before. His death confirmed that the food was poisoned and that the Prophet had spoken the truth. The Jewess also confessed that she had poisoned the sheep. So now there was no doubt that it was poisoned.

The poison did not take long to act upon Bishr. But, surprise! “The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) ate of it and the people also ate” Yet he did not die from it nor did anyone else die from it. A double miracle, supporting his prophethood!

When the Jewess was asked why she did it, she said that if he was a true prophet the poison would not harm him. It did not harm him. He lived for four years after the incident. Does this not show that he was protected by God?

My friend, if this miracle had happened to Jesus, peace be on him, you would be boasting about it and you would be claiming that it is proof that he was God! Muslims, on the contrary, simply say that Allah miraculously protected the Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him.

My friend, you asked:

Why did Muhammad not get cured by his own remedy of ajwa dates for poison? Why did God not miraculously cure Muhammad...?

Answer: I have already given the answer above. Allah kept the poison from affecting him for four years. He did not need ajwa dates. Allah is the Controller of life and death. However, since Muhammad, peace be on him, lived another four years, he probably ate ajwa dates on many occasions.

Some of your apologetic friends ask why he did not take ajwa dates to protect himself before eating. The answer is above. But an additional point is that maybe Allah caused him to forget to take precautions in order to bring about this miracle.

My friend, how long will poison take to kill another man if it killed one man in a few hours or a few days? Have you ever heard of an incident in history when someone died from powerful poison but another survived it and lived without taking any medication for years? Do you know of a case when a group of people took poison and only one died from it?

How long after ingesting the poison did the Prophet die? Four years! This is a miracle because it does not happen.

Some reports say that the Prophet suffered from the poison during those four years and it is reported from one of his companions that he could see its effects upon his palate. Others who were close to him never mentioned this, though you will find many descriptions of him in hadith in all conditions. But let us assume that it is authentic, yet during those last four years he lived a

very active life, more than many people of the past and present. He did not act as if he was sickened by poison. Look at his achievements during that time. I'll come to that, in sha Allah.

My friend, you asked:

Imagine you are table (sic) besides Muhammad and you die of poison like Bishr, would you still consider Muhammad to be a prophet in your final moments after ingesting poison and before dying?

My friend, you seem to be implying that if you are sitting and eating with a prophet whom you believe in, and he tells you that you have eaten poisoned food, you would reject him as a false prophet and die as a rejecter of faith in him. This shows how weak your faith is.

The Prophet did not teach his companions to want to live forever. He taught them that the Hereafter is better for them than this world. He taught them that they would encounter many tests in this world. He taught them that if they died as martyrs, their status in paradise would be extremely lofty. In some battles he even marked off the spots where some of his companions would be killed. Did this dissuade them from coming into the battlefield? Rather, they said, "this is the promise of Allah and His messenger, and their promise is true." And they died where he said that they would die. He taught them that martyrdom comes not only in the battlefield. Even when they are off the battlefield, the enemy is trying to kill them. So Bishr's faith in the Prophet would have been strengthened and he would have been saying with his last breath "the promise of Allah and His messenger is true. Paradise, here I come!"

One of your Christian apologetics who spoke about this incident and whose video you must have followed with keen attention, has mentioned reports that Bishr, before he died, said that he saw the Prophet eating the sheep so he ate, even though he had tasted the poison in the sheep. This was after the Prophet's announcement of the poison and when Bishr was on his dying bed. His belief and confidence in the Prophet was not shaken. He died a believer.

According to your scripture, your God, apparently, was afraid of death. When he was on the cross, he cried out to his God (!?) saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Let's be clear, this is not the Muslim Jesus. The Quran testifies that he was not crucified.

Four Active Years of the Prophet's Life

Not only did he live for another four years, but he also accomplished the mission that Allah entrusted him with. Not only did he survive, but his companions did, too. He lived actively and traveled a lot during those four years, not showing any signs of sickness, until all aspects of the religion were completed. Here is a partial list of his activities during that time.

7 AH: performs the lesser pilgrimage to Makkah to make up for the previous year when the Makkans barred Muslims from entering Makkah, dispatches an expedition to Mu'ta to confront Romans who were threatening Madinah.

8 AH: prepared and led a huge army that liberated Makkah, and engaged in battles such as the Battles of Hunain and Taif.

9 AH: organized a huge army and marched with them to Tabuk in the heat of the summer sun to confront the Romans who were still threatening Madinah, and received deputations from Arab tribes all over Arabia who came to accept Islam or pledge allegiance.

10 AH: travelled to Makkah for the Farewell Pilgrimage during which Allah revealed to him the following verse *“This day have I perfected for you your religion, completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam as your religion.”* (Quran, 5:3) He delivered his farewell sermon during the Hajj, summarizing all of the main teachings of Islam. Study the Qur’an and you will see how comprehensive and complete the teachings of Islam are.

10-11 AH. He organized and dispatched another force under Usamah Ibn Zayd to once again confront the threat of the Romans.

The Prophet was right when he said to the Jewess *“Allah will not give you power over me.”* Allah enabled him to live an active life and complete his mission in record time.

Did anyone who had witnessed the poisoning incident say after his death, *“this proves that he was a false prophet”* and stopped believing in him?

My friend, do you not find these four years amazing from someone who was suffering from poison?

My friend, wasn't it the Divine Plan for him to accomplish his mission? Did God not support him in those last years?

My friend, would God have supported a false prophet all the way to the completion of his mission? Would he have allowed a false prophet to live for four active years after being poisoned (which, according to the Jewess, was supposed to prove him false) and then allow him to make the proclamation in God's Holy Name *“This day have I perfected for you your religion, completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam as your religion.”* (Quran, 5:3) ???

My friend, imagine if Jesus, peace be on him, had made this declaration before his death, how much you would be boasting about it??

The mere fact that the Qur’an announces the completion of his mission is sufficient proof that he was supported by God. So is it, then, surprising that after his mission was accomplished, he declared *“now it is time for the poison to act upon me!”* ??

My friend, Muhammad, peace be on him, did not accumulate worldly riches for himself. He lived the simplest of life and showed gratitude to Allah for giving him sufficient.

My friend, why did he, peace be on him, say “now is the time for the poison to act upon me” only in his last sickness, a few days before his death? Why did he not say this on other occasions during the previous four years whenever he felt the poison acting up in him?

My friend, who inspired him to make this declaration shortly before he died?

My friend, you asked:

Why then did Muhammad suffer greatly and die of the ill effects of poison? Can Muhammad be a prophet in light of the above?

All prophets suffered. Jesus, peace be upon him, suffered, as Christians will admit. Allah wanted Muhammad, peace be on him, to die a martyr and to have the high status of martyrdom in his long list of achievements.

The Prophet, peace be on him, taught that the suffering of a righteous person will erase for him any wrongs that he may have committed so that he can meet his Lord absolutely cleansed of sins or so that he may be elevated to the highest levels in Paradise. Prophets did not commit sins. So his suffering may be to elevate his status in Paradise.

Let me add something here. Christian apologetics gleefully quote Surah 69:44-46, “*And if he had invented false sayings concerning Us, We assuredly had taken him by the right hand, and then severed his aorta*” and claim that since Muhammad’s aorta was severed by his own admission, he is a false prophet. Their reasoning and yours is not right.

Let’s examine the words of the Qur’an carefully. What is the meaning of severing his aorta? The Qur’an is using this expression here as a threat. It means that Allah would not allow him to continue making false claims but he would meet his death swiftly. The expression is not being used in its everyday meaning.

What is the everyday meaning of this expression “severing the aorta?”

My friend, your aorta and my aorta will be cut off when we die. The severing of one’s aorta literally means that our blood will stop flowing to our hearts. This happens to everyone. Obviously, the Qur’an does not mean it in this literal sense as it would mean that Allah is threatening to make him die like everyone else dies!! It would then not be a threat but a meaningless statement!

The Qur’an is making a threat. It means that his life would be stopped short and he would die swiftly. But you know that his life was not cut short as he lived for four more years and fulfilled his mission and died content that he had fulfilled his mission.

My friend, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him, said “this is the time when my aorta will be cut off” Did he drop dead immediately? No, he made this statement four long, active years after ingesting the poison! And even after making the statement, he lived for days before he died.

His life was not suddenly cut short, which would have happened if he were an impostor. Before dying, he was informed that his death was near since his mission was about to be completed. So he was not alarmed when death came. There were many signs of the approach of his death.

For example, in his Farewell Pilgrimage, he said: "I do not know whether I will ever meet you at this place once again after this current year."

When Surah An-Nasr was revealed, 'Umar wept. Asked why he wept though the Surah is proclaiming victory for Muslims, he said that it was announcing the death of the Prophet, peace be on him.

During his last sickness, he was able to come into the mosque. Here he sat, facing the Muslims. Among the things he said was "A servant was given the choice to remain in the world or to meet his Lord, and he chose to meet his Lord." Abu Bakr wept because he understood that "the servant" was the Prophet himself, peace be on him.

Yes, he was given the choice to remain alive, maybe another few years, or to meet his Lord. And he chose the latter.

Moments before he died, at intervals he uttered these words: "The most exalted Companionship on high. To Allâh we belong and to Him we shall return." So he was heard making the choice to return to Allah.

"He led the Muslims in prayer for eleven days though he was sick. The total number of his sick days was either thirteen or fourteen." (The Sealed Nectar)

The poison acted only when Allah decreed that it should act so that the Prophet may achieve martyrdom. He lived until he was sixty-three years of age and died when and how Allah decided.

According to Christians, the Jews plotted against Jesus, peace be on him, and they succeeded in having him killed! Why do you say that this proves Jesus was the son of God while the killing of the Prophet Muhammad proves that he was not a true prophet?

My friend, although you believe that Jesus had to die for your sins, you still blame the Jews! And Christians continued to persecute them for centuries!