

# The Story of Tubba

*In Ziā al-Nabī (Vol. III, pp. 126-129), Ziā al-Ummah Pīr Muhammad Karam Shāh al-Azharī writes about an event that took place one thousand years before the appearance of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). What follows is a brief account of this wonderful story, which undoubtedly emphasises the importance of the Mawlid.*

The story centres around Tubba, who was the king of Yemen. His actual name was Abū Karb; Tubba is merely the title given to anyone who is crowned king of Yemen, in the same way all leaders of Egypt were called Fir'awn (Pharaoh) and all leaders of Rome were called *Qaysar*. Tubba would travel with his large entourage and army, conquering land and seizing material benefit.

Tubba passed through the Saudi Peninsula and visited Makka. Though he initially planned to destroy the Ka'ba, he eventually developed a love for it and became one of the first people to clothe it (*Ghilāf Ka'ba*). Tubba and his entourage left Makka and headed for al-Madīna al-Munawwara (which was then called Yathrib).

The army and entourage had developed a habit of not staying at any particular place for a period of time. They would conquer a place and then move on. However, when they reached Yathrib (al-Madīna al-Munawwara), four-hundred scholars from the entourage of Tubba informed him that they did not intend to travel any further. Instead, they desired to remain in Yathrib forever, though the place at the time was not inhabitable. King Tubba called his closest minister and asked him to enquire why the scholars did not want to travel any further. After all, they had remained with him in his travels permanently until now and he dearly needed them. The scholars explained that they had come from Makka to Yathrib. From studying their scriptures, they had learnt that this land was the final migration place of the last Messenger, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), who would migrate here from Makka. They had studied their sources and deduced that he would affirm the oneness of Allāh. The scholars said that they had realised that those who meet him would be most fortunate. They too wanted to meet him, or at least reside there so their children could meet them in the future.

The King accepted their interpretation and developed a love for Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) too. Hence he decided that (a) he too would reside there and wait for Muhammad's (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) appearance (b) He would then move on but before doing so, he would build four-hundred homes for the scholars so that they could reside there permanently (c) he would give the most senior scholar a letter, which was to be handed over to Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) eventually through generation to generation.

A thousand years later, these same people heard the good news that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) had reached Quba, on the outskirts of al-Madīna. The wait was finally over. Hence, they made preparations to meet him and hand the letter of Tubba to him. The Companion Abd al-Rahmān ibn Awf was in al-Madīna at the time and he met with this tribe. He informed him that the correct etiquette of presenting the letter should be that the most senior member of the tribe should pass the letter to Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) . His name was Abū Layla. And so, Abū Layla set off from al-Madīna to Quba, with the duty of giving the letter to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him).

It just so happened that the Messenger was not in Quba at that particular time. He was with the Salīm tribe, who were situated on the path between al-Madīna and Quba. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) saw Abū Layla on the path, and through his God-given knowledge, recognised him and knew why he was coming to meet him. So the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) saw him and said: 'You are Abū Layla?' Abū Layla replied in the affirmative, though he did not know who he was. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said: 'Have you got the letter from Tubba for me?' Abū Layla was astonished. How did this person know who he was and that he had the letter from Tubba? And so he asked the Messenger: 'Who are you?' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) replied: 'I am Muhammad.' He then informed him to return to al-Madīna, where he would soon join them.

When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) reached al-Madīna al-Munawwara, the Prophet entrusted Abū Bakr (may Allāh be pleased with him) to read the letter in front of everyone. The letter read:

اما بعد يا محمد اني امنت بك و بكتابك الذي نزله الله عليك و انا علي دينك و  
امنت بربك و رب كل شئى و ان أدركت فيها و نعمت و ان لم ادركك فاشفع لي  
يوم القيامة

'O Muhammad! Verily I have faith in you and in the book that Allāh revealed to you. And I am upon your religion and I believe in your Lord, the Lord of everything. If I meet you in Yathrib, then most fortunate I am. And if I do not meet you, then please perform intercession for me on the Day of Judgement.'

Upon hearing the letter, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

مرحبا بالاخ الصالح  
'Welcome, the pious brother.'

Undoubtedly, this wonderful story gives us an insight into how fortunate we are to be the followers of the best of creations, Sayyidunā Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). People waited for centuries for the appearance of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). He was the *du'ā* of Ibrāhīm and the glad-tidings of Īsā (peace be upon them). In essence, all of them, including Tubba, were waiting for the birth of Sayyidunā Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). This is the reason why we commemorate the Mawlid with great passion, verve and enthusiasm.

**Dr. Hafiz Ather Hussain al-Azhari.**

*BA Principles of Theology, al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt.*

*MA Arabic and Islamic Studies, Dar al-Ulum Muhammadia Ghawsia, Bhera, Pakistan.*

*BA Political Science, MPhil Theology & PhD Theology, University of Birmingham.*

[www.twitter.com/Hafiz\\_Ather](http://www.twitter.com/Hafiz_Ather)