Salman-e-Farsi

Salman the Persian details: Early Years in Persia (Iran)

According to the investigations and researches of the Arab historians, Salman was born in or around the year 568 A.D., in a small town in Persia called Jiyye. The modern city of Isfahan stands on the site of Jiyye. Incidentally, Salman was not the name given to him at his birth. His Persian name was Rozeba. Many years later when he became a Muslim, his master, Muhammed Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah (May Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt), changed his name to Salman. During the years when he was at the court of his master, Muhammed Mustafa, his friends sometimes, also addressed him, as Abu Abdullah (the father of Abdullah).

Salman's father was a rich landlord and a powerful political figure in Jiyye and the surrounding areas. He had much prosperity in the city, and vast estates in the country, and he had numerous slaves and many herds of horse. Since Salman was his only son he lavished all his love upon him.

Most Persians (Iranians) in those days were Magians or Zoroastrians (followers of the Persian prophet Zoroaster). Salman was also taught the principles and doctrines of Zoroastrianism. He was in his early teens when he grasped the highly complex, sometimes esoteric doctrines and dogmas of the Persian national belief and soon he knew as much as his own teachers and the priests of the Zoroastrian fire temples of Jiyye did.

In those days in Persia, it was considered a great honor to be a priest in one of the fire-temples. Service in a fire-temple provided the priests with status, prestige and numerous perquisites. Since in Persian also, the priests could reach high position in local and "national" governments, Salman's father managed to get him appointed as a priest in the local fire-temple while he was only sixteen years old.

For three years, Salman played priest in the fire-temple of Jiyye but then he began to lost interest in his work. It had become too monotonous and wearisome for him. The priests were men of limited vision and limited knowledge and they were too dogmatic. If he posed any creedal question to them, they were, in most cases, unable to answer him; or, they spoke in a language of allusions, historical allegories and parallels.

One day in spring (circa 586 A.D.), Salman's father had some important business to attend to at one of his country houses. But before he could go to the country, some merchants arrived in

Jiyye from the ancient city of Balkh and to entertain them he had to stay in Jiyye itself. He, therefore, asked Salman to go in his stead, and briefed him on what he had to do at the country house.

The following day Salman left Jiyye for his father's country estate. When Salman had traveled a few miles from the city, he came upon a fork in the road, and standing upon the brow of an eminence, he paused for a few minute to survey the surroundings and to determine the direction of his destination.

The light was now rapidly advancing from the east, and was tinting the landscape. Presently the sun rose and as Salman was still basking in the stream of the rays of the rising sun a grey stone edifice, partly veiled in golden mist, caught his eye. It was some distance from the road, and Salman decided to find out what it was and to whom did it belong. He, therefore, went near it to take a closer look at it.

Salman, propelled by his curiosity, entered the building to investigate. Inside, people were conducting a religious service and a choir was singing a hymn in a foreign language, which he did not understand. When the service was over, one member of the congregation came to him, greeted him, and asked him who he was, and what was the purpose of his visit.

Salman told him who he was, and explained that he wished to know who they were, and what creed they professed. He was taken to the "high priest" who explained to him that they were Christians from Syria and explained to him the Oneness of God, the Day of Judgment, and the role of the Apostles, Messengers and Prophets of God. Salman questioned the Christian priest regarding their beliefs and eventually the priest initiated him into Christianity.

When Salman was late coming home, his father became very anxious. His father sat, hacked with nameless fears and dark forebodings, in the court of his palatial house, surrounded by his friends who were trying to comfort him. Suddenly, Salman entered through the gate. His father threw his arms around him and asked him where he had disappeared.

Salman proceeded to explain to his father that he had ridden past a church of Christians and was with them all day long. His father then said that he hoped that those people hadn't misled him and his religion and the religion of his forefathers was the right one. Salman refuted his father by proclaiming that their religion was better than Zoroastrianism.

Angered by this, his father threatened him with imprisonment and torture if Salman did not swear that he had not and will not change his religion. Salman, however, refused and was beaten and tortured, and was kept hungry and thirsty in his prison day after day.

One of the servants of Salman's father was a young man called Mehran. He had reared Salman from his infancy, and he loved him like his own son. Salman knew that he could trust Mehran,

and asked him one day if he could put him touch with the Christian priest who might assist him in escaping to Syria.

Mehran was only too glad to give this service to his young master and he arranged for his escape. After a few days Mehran came to see Salman and informed him that a caravan was ready to leave for Syria. The following night Mehran entered his cell, removed the shackles from his feet, gave him a new set of clothes to wear, and led him quietly out of the house while everyone was sound asleep.

Outside the house, a horse was awaiting Salman. He thanked Mehran for his invaluable help, bade him a silent and tearful farewell, and rode out of Jiyye. Upon arrival in the church, Salman thanked his Christian friends for what they were doing him. The priests gave special instructions to the leader of the caravan regarding the welfare of Salman. The high priest then committed Salman to the protection of God. The caravan left Jiyye the same night, and moving at a brisk pace, put considerable distance between itself and the city before daybreak.

The Years in the Wilderness

Nearly a month after its departure from Jiyye in Persia, the caravan arrived in the ancient city of Damascus. Salman had come to the journey's end but quite frequently; the end of one journey is the beginning of another. Salman too had a new journey ahead of him but he knew that the new journey would be in the realm of spirit.

Salman at this time was in the nineteenth year of his life. He was rangy and muscular, and he had a powerful build. He was endowed with a highly retentive memory, and a most penetrating intelligence. He had a critical and an analytic mind that applied logic to every situation. In his physical characteristics and his mental attributes he surpassed all the young men of his age and generation. Just as he was tall, broad and robust beyond his years, he was also wise, prudent, and sagacious and his experience. Early in his life, he had cultivated a temperate personality. In Jiyye – his hometown – he had riches, luxury, and high status – all within grasp. But he spurned them all, and he did so not withstanding his extreme youth. Instead of seeking power and pleasure, as other young men of his generation did, he made the pursuit of Knowledge and Truth the "vocation" of his life. He was the idealist par excellence.

After leaving Jiyye in Persia, Salman lived in four other cities. He lived for ten years in Damascus, and then during the next twenty years, he lived in Mosul, Nasibin and Ammuria. In each of these cities, he read, studied, observed, and he assimilated all the religious knowledge that was extant. He also spent much time in devotions in the hope of finding the gift of enlightenment and inner peace. But his religious experience during this period was almost

entirely subjective. It arose out of and was identified by means of his awareness of his own mental states and psychological processes. There were times when his interior world became so vivid that he lost touch with the exterior world. This alarmed him. One question that arose persistently in his mind was if it was right to turn one's back upon the world and its problems, and to try to win felicity and inner peace for one's owns self.

With the passage of time, the specter of doubt began to rear its head in Salman's thoughts. He felt that Truth - the Ultimate Truth - was still hidden from his, and this after an effort to find it that had spanned more than a quarter century. When Salman was tormented too much by these thoughts, and when he knew he had come to and impasse, he turned to God, and prayed to Him to give him deliverance from doubt and skepticism, and lead him to the destination which He had chosen for him. Little did he know, the light of guidance that he wished and hoped to see, was soon to appear on the horizon.

Slavery

The last city, in which Salman lived, was Ammuria - a city in the eastern part of Asia Minor - then a province of the Eastern Roman Empire or the Byzantium Empire. It was in Ammuria that he heard, for the first time, vague reports of the appearance, in Makkah in Arabia, of a new prophet. According to these reports, this new prophet forbade the worship of idols and images and preached the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty and Oneness of God.

It occurred to Salman that the Flame of Truth, which he was seeking, might be the one burning in Makkah in Arabia. Suddenly, Makkah appeared to be beckoning him to come. He, therefore, made up his mind to go to Makkah to meet the Arabian prophet as soon as his circumstances would allow, and to interrogate him personally on the problems, which had been perplexing him.

Toward late summer in that year, some travelers arrived in Ammuria from the south. Salman's enquiries revealed that these travelers were horse traders from a city called Yathrib in Arabia. They told him that after selling their horses, they would return to Damascus to make connection with a caravan that was being "assembled" there for the return journey to Yathrib. Salman met the leader of these horse traders and requested him to allow him to travel with them to Damascus, and thence to Yathrib. In return for his favor, he offered to pay him his modest savings. The Leader of the horse traders agreed.

The journey was long and arduous. But Salman endured the travail with stoical courage. While other travelers rode their camels or horses. Salman walked, a feat of endurance that astonished them.

Eventually, Salman's carvan arrived in the oasis of Wadi-ul-Qura in the Hijaz, and the leader of the caravan announced that they would halt there for three days and three nights. In this time, Salman made plans for the last leg of his journey from Yathrib to Makkah. What he did not know at this time was that bitter disappointment was lying in wait for him "just around the corner." They offered Salman for sale to the highest bidder among the Jews. Salman protested that he was not a slave, and could not be sold or bought but he could not produce any "witnesses" who would vouch that he was a free man. His Jewish master made him a prisoner, and the caravan left for its destination without him.

Salman attracted much attention in Wadi-ul-Qura due to his gigantic stature and many showed an interest in buying him. One of the bidders, however, was a cousin of Salman's master; He lived in Yathrib and visited Wadi-ul-Qura on business. He became so insistent on buying Salman that his (Salman's) master agreed to sell him.

Before long, in Yathrib also, a competition began among the Jews to buy Salman. His master did not want to sell him but he found one of the offers so attractive that he accepted it, and sold him. The new master sold him again. Thus he passed through many hands. Eventually, a rich Jew - one Uthman bin Ashhel - bought him.

Uthman and the other Jews had never seen a slave like Salman. They noted that he didn't talk much but whenever he did, he spoke words of profound wisdom. His judgment, they noted, was like the judgment of Solomon himself. His master benefited, not only from his work but also from his advice and his opinions, which he sought from him quite frequently. But he was a vicious and brutal taskmaster, and made Salman work almost non-stop.

Salman's work was difficult and laborious but he did not allow his adverse circumstances to extinguish the flame that the hope of meeting Muhammed (S.A.W) had kindled in his breast. The hope of meeting Muhammed (S.A.W) revived him each day, there was magic in the name of Muhammad (S.A.W) that never failed to work. Whenever Salman had a rough day, he reminded himself that he had a "rendezvous" with Muhammed (S.A.W), he bounced back.

One morning when Salman began his descent from the top of a tree, he noticed that his master, who sat at its foot, was engaged in talking with a stranger. From this stranger it was gathered that Muhammed (S.A.W) had come to Yathrib and the Aus and Khazraj had taken an oath of loyalty to him. Immediately upon hearing this Salman's mind constantly wondered how he could finally meet Muhammed (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt).

Salman's Meeting with Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W) and his Induction into Islam

One evening Uthman bin Ashhel was away from the oasis on some business, and Salman

availed of the opportunity to realize his wish, He put the ripe and fresh dates which he had earned that day as his wages, in a bag, and went into the city to find Muhammed (may Allah bless him and his family), and to have audience with him.

Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W) was living, at this time, in the house of Hadhret Abu Ayub Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him), as his guest, each step that Salman took toward his destination heightened his anticipation. And then the great moment came. Salman the Persian was escorted into the presence of Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W), the beloved of God, and his (Salman's) own unseen beloved. His heart was bounding inside his ribs like a bird fluttering in a cage but he was making a supreme effort to steady himself. Suddenly, he was arrested in mid-motion by the vision framed in the arch.

Muhammed Mustafa (may Allah bless him and his family) was seated in the reception room of the house. A few companions sat in front of him. Salman's first glance fell upon his face, and all at once he felt himself dazzled by a thousand sparkling lights. He heard himself saying quietly: "By God, this cannot be the face of a man who has ever told a lie. If there is any face that can be the face of a messenger of God, that is the face of this man."

After the exchange of preliminary greeting, Salman stated the purpose of his visit. Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W) told Salman that the message that he had brought, was called Islam, and he explained its meaning to him as total surrender of a man, without reservation, to the Will and pleasure of Allah. Salman could not wait long enough and begged Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W) to admit him to the company of those slaves of Allah who surrender themselves to His Will and His pleasure.

Muahmmed Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his family), thereupon, inducted Salman the Persian into Islam. The first requirement for Salman in this induction was to believe that God was One and had no partners or associates, and that Muhammed was His Messenger. The doctrine of the Oneness of God is called Tauheed, and it is the axis of Islam. The mission of Muhammed as God's last messenger to mankind is called Risalet. The second requirement for Salman was to declare his faith in Tauheed and in Risalet.

Salman had been enlisted into the service of Allah by His Own Messenger - Muhammed Mustafa(S.A.W) - an honor and a distinction he was to remain proud of all his life, At the same time, he was also admitted into the ranks of his (Muhammed's) friends.

Induction into Islam was an appropriate occasion for change of Salman's name. His Persian name was Rozeba. Muhammed Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah, changed it to Salman. Salman loved his new name; he forgot his Persian name, and he is known to history only by his Islamic name.

Then Muhammed Mustafa (may Allah bless him and his family) read, for Salman's edification, some passages from Quran Majid - the book revealed to him by Heaven - and he was carried away by its magisterial cadences. Those words, which he heard, were "incandescent". And he sensed that they could not have been put together anywhere but in Heaven itself.

After this momentous event, Salman came to see the Messenger of Allah as often as he could, and each time, he brought, either a present for him or sadaqa (charity) for his companions. He brought only what he had earned as his wages.

It was inevitable that Salman would arouse the curiosity of the Muslims who had seen him; just as earlier, he had, that of the Jews. Eventually, Muhammed Mustafa (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt) himself asked him to tell the story of his life. Salman then recounted the saga of his life.

Muhammed Mustafa (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt) embraced Salman, kissed him on his forehead, rubbed his hand over his (Salman's) face, and over his heart; prayed for him, and invoked Allah's mercy and His blessings upon him. It was a poignant moment in the life of both of them.

Seemingly the long journey for Salman had ended. He had discovered the fountainhead of Eternal Truths and Everlasting Bliss in Islam, and he has become a personal friend of Muhammed Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah. However, his status as a slave hung like a dark cloud over his life.

Muhammed Mustafa (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt) who was a mercy for all Creation, was aware of Salman's distress, and suggested to him one day to ransom his freedom. Salman broached the subject to his master hoping that he would agree to set him free for a ransom. But the latter who knew Salman had become Muslim, refused to ransom him because he believed he would become a soldier in Muhammed's army and fight against the Jews.

Eventually, however, after the expulsion of two of the three Jewish tribes of Medina, after their betrayals at the Battle of Badr and the Battle of Uhud, Uthman bin Ashhel become a little less unreasonable. Therefore, when Salman broached the subject of paying ransom for his freedom once again, he (Uthman) was willing to listen, and he was willing to negotiate the terms of his emancipation with him.

Uthman specified to Salman the price of his freedom. Salman would have to plant in Uthman's gardens, three hundred young date palms, and he would pay him 40 oz. of gold.

Salman presented these terms to Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W). The latter, thereupon, turned to his companions, and said to them: "Assist your brother."

All the companions rose to assist their brother. One of them brought thirty saplings; another brought twenty; a third brought fifteen; a fourth ten, and so on, until they had collected all three hundred as required by the Jew. The Prophet then ordered the companions to dig the earth in which the saplings were to be planted. When the ground was ready for planting, he himself came, and planted the first tree with his own hands. Then the companions took charge of the project, and planted the other trees. Every tree struck roots, and not one out of the three hundred was lost.

Three hundred date palms were planted in the garden of Uthman bin Ashhel but Salman still had to pay 40 oz. of gold to him. He was not free yet.

A few more weeks passed, and then one day Muhammed Mustafa (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt) sent for Salman. When the latter came into the Mosque, he noticed that he was seated on the floor, and his companions sat around him. In front of him there was a tray and in the tray there were some nuggets of gold.

The Messenger of Allah gave the gold to Salman and told him to take it and give it to his master as the balance of his ransom.

Suddenly everything changed for Salman. The gulf between slavery and freedom had appeared to him to be unfathomable and unbridgeable. But he had called Allah and His Messenger for aid. They had responded, and with their aid, he had cleared the "gulf."

Islam and Freedom had extricated Salman from the vast wilderness of time which his past had been until then, and from that moment, he became "future-oriented," as five years earlier, he had become "Islam-oriented."

After his emancipation from the slavery of a Jew, Salman the Persian became a slave once again - voluntarily. This time he chose his own master, and they were Allah and His Messenger, Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W). This new "slavery" became his greatest pride and his greatest pleasure.

The Battle of Ahzab or the Siege of Medina

Salman the Persian had just redeemed his freedom when Medina, the capital of Islam, was threatened by an unprecedented peril. In early February 627, Muhammed Mustafa (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt), received intelligence that the polytheists of Makkah had completed their preparations for the invasion of Medina with a cavalry and infantry of ten thousand seasoned warriors of Arabia, and also learned that their resolution was to obliterate Islam in one massive, coordinated attack.

The Makkan generals might have captured Medina with their "hit-and-run" fighting strategy but

for the presence in that city of a "foreigner" - Salman the Persian. He worked out strategy of his own, and his counter-strategy foiled the Makkan strategy. He said to the Prophet that if a trench, too deep and too wide for the horses to leap over, were dug on the exposed section of the perimeter of the city, it would immobilize the enemy cavalry.

When the trench was being dug, one of Muhajireen who was watching Salman, claimed him as a Muhajir (Immigrant from Makkah). "Salman is one of us, Muhajireen," he said. But he was at once challenged by the Muslims of Medina (the Ansar) when they heard this, and one of them said: "No. Salman is one of us, Ansar."

A lively argument began between the two groups of Muslims - the Muhajireen and the Ansar - each of them claiming that Salman belonged to their group, and not to the other group.

Presently, the Apostle of Allah arrived on the scene, and he too heard the argument of the Muhajireen and the Ansar. He was amused by the claims of the two sides but he soon put an end to their argument by saying: "Salman is neither Muhajir nor Ansar. He is one of us. He is one of the People of the House."

This is the greatest honor ever bestowed upon anyone by Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W), the Messenger of Allah. As recipient of revelations from Heaven, and as its interpreter, he declared that Salman was a member of his house - the Family of the Chosen one of Allah. No one else in the entire history of Islam has ever been elevated to such high rank as Salman the Persian.

Hardly the last spiteful of earth had been cast out of the trench, when the cavaliers of Makkah arrived, thundering across the desert - like a whirlwind. But suddenly they were checked in their career by a strange new obstacle - the trench.

The siege of Medina might have lasted a long time with unpredictable results but it did not. One of the Makkan generals - Amr ibn Abd Wudd - lost patience with this "static" or "un-Arab" mode of fighting, and he decided to change its character by hurdling the trench, and by carrying a "dynamic" or an "Arab" war into the camp of the Muslims. Amr ibn Abd Wudd and three of his staff officers, therefore, went on an inspection of the trench and discovered a rocky projection in it which the Muslims had been unable to cut and used it to jump the trench.

Once inside the perimeter of the city, he boldly advanced toward the encampment of the Muslims, and challenged them to single combat in the classical tradition of Arabian warfare. A duel between Amr ibn Abd Wud and Ali ibn Abi Talib(A.S.) was fought, with Ali being victorious. As soon as Amr fell to the ground, the other three knights who had accompanied him hastily retreated across the trench.

The death of Amr ibn Abd Wud was the deathblow to the morale and the will-to-fight of the Makkan army. All its hopes for quick victory over the Muslims had lain in him, and with his

death, it began to fall apart.

The failure of the Siege of Medina in 627 was a most significant even in the history of Islam and of Arabia. It meant that the infidels of Makkah could never be able to mount another invasion of Medina - the fortress of Islam. The successful defense of Medina made Islam "invulnerable." After the battle of Ahzab, the initiative passed, finally and irreversibly, from the infidels of Makkah to the Muslims of Medina, and Islam was able to move into a position of dominance in the Peninsula.

The Death of Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W), the Blessed Messenger of Allah

Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W) was the sun and moon of the world of Salman, and with his death, it was plunged into darkness. Salman had known disaster and tragedy in life but the loss of his friend, Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W), was the most staggering blow to him ever. It was a shock from which, he thought, he might never recover. He felt as if he might lose his grip on life itself. He was 65-years old when his master Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W) died.

Next to Muhammed Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bles him and his Ahlul-Bayt), his first cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib(A.S.), was the focus of Salman's live and devotion, The love of Muhammed and Ali was, for him, the perpetual and unfailing touchstone of the faith of a Muslim. He loved and served Ali with the same zeal as he had served Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W).

In June 656, Ali ibn Abi Talib(A.S.) ascended the throne of the caliphate in Medina as the successor of Muhammed Mustafa, The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt). One of his first acts, upon taking charge of the government of the Muslims, was to appoint Salman el-Farsi the governor of the city and the districts of Madaen in Iraq.

At this time, Salman was quite advanced in years. But thanks to his abstemiousness, and to the Spartan discipline he had imposed upon himself all his life, he was in top physical and mental condition.

He left Medina on his 800 miles long journey to Madaen carrying online a "sajjada" made of palm-leaf on which to say prayers, a bag containing crusts of barley bread, a water bag made of goat skin, a cup and a pillow. These were all his worldly possessions. However, by the time he arrived at his destination he had given all these things away, except the "sajjada", because he saw others in need of these items.

Unfortunately within a few weeks of his arrival Salman the Persian, the slave of Allah, and the bosom friend of Muhammed Mustafa (S.A.W) and Ali ibn Abi Talib (A.S.), died. He was 88 years old at his death, and was buried in Madaen.

May Allah be pleased with His loving salve, Salman el-Farsi, and may He overwhelm his soul with His Bounty, Grace and Mercy.