

MUHAMMAD ALI

The Man, The Muslim, The Hero

INTRODUCTION

Each day before sunrise, a man rises from a bed on a farm in Berrien Springs, Michigan (USA). Quietly as mandated by the Qur'an, he washes himself with clear running water. Then he puts on clean clothes, faces Makkah, with his hands at his sides, and says to himself, ***"I intend to perform the morning prayer as ordered by Allah, the Lord of the Worlds"*** The man is Muhammad Ali, the most recognizable person on earth. For half a century he has walked among us, his face as familiar as that of a close friend. The world didn't just see or hear Ali it felt him. And if he hasn't just always been part of the landscape, it somehow seems that way now.

WHO IS THIS MAN MUHAMMAD ALI?

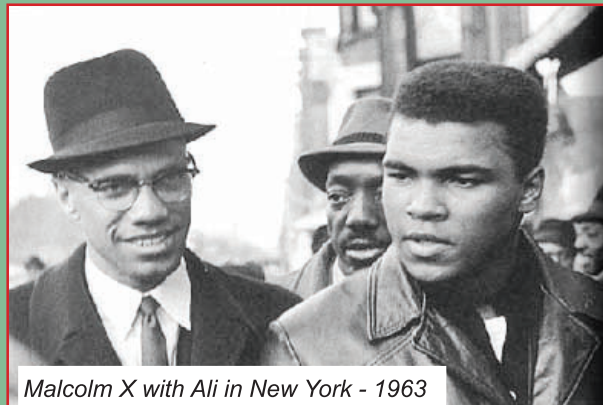
Ali was born Cassius Marcellus Clay on 17 January 1942. His father, Clay Snr., earned a living painting billboards and signs. His mother Odessa Clay, taught him about God and according to Ali didn't drink, smoke, meddle in other people's business and there's no one who's been better to him in his whole life. Rahaman Ali (formerly Rudolph Clay) and Muhammad were very close as brothers. Rahaman says: ***"I have always shared in my brothers joys and sorrows."*** They both grew up in an era where segregation was a way of life. They were constantly being told: ***"Hey - Nigger what are you doing here?"*** While in school, Ali trained six days a week. He never smoked or drank alcohol, boxing kept him out of trouble. His dream as a schoolboy was to become the heavyweight champion of the World. The trials and tribulations of his life placed a tremendous strain on his personal life. He is now married for the fourth time to Lonnie and his children from the four marriages are Hana, Laila, Rashida, Jamila, Mariam, Muhammad Jr., Miya & Khaliah.

ALI THE ENTERTAINER

After winning the 1960 Olympics, Ali was positioned for a love-in with the American people. He was young, handsome, entertaining and gifted. He radiated the aura of an all American boy. Ali changed boxing. In promoting boxing, he made the fighter the main person. He was successful at self-promotion because he had the personality to carry it off. According to Angelo Dundee, his trainer, he was the most available superstar of our era and extra-ordinarily handsome. There was no need to promote his fights. He did it all for you, poetry, round predictions and most of all his charm. He revolutionized the business of boxing, introducing different techniques such as the ***"Ali Shuffle"*** and the ***"Rope a Dope"*** amongst others.

BIRTH OF ALI, THE MUSLIM

From a young age, Ali had a deep sense of religiosity and spiritualism. He felt he was a special vessel and might be ordained for special things. In September 1963, the media reported that Ali was attending Muslim rallies. In 1964 before the Sonny Liston fight, Ali travelled to New York with Malcolm X and addressed the rally. His father announced that he had converted to the Islamic faith and was now called Muhammad Ali. After his brilliant victory over Sonny Liston, in an interview he was asked if he was a card carrying member of the Black Muslims. Ali answered: ***"Card carrying member, what does that mean. I believe in Allah and peace. Black Muslims is a press word. It's not a legitimate name. The real name is ISLAM. That means peace, Islam is a religion and there are 1 billion people all over the World."***



Malcolm X with Ali in New York - 1963

ALI AND MALCOLM X

Malcolm X loved Ali as a younger brother. Malcolm did not want other people to exploit Ali's talents and felt he could do more. Malcolm felt that Ali could gain great internal strength just from being a Muslim. Ali referred to Malcolm as being very intelligent with a good sense of humour. In the fight against Liston, Malcolm continuously told him that not only was he young, strong and skillful, he was a man that believed in Allah. Malcolm X believed that Ali was a symbol for people around the World, particularly the young, regardless of ethnicity.

ALI AND THE VIETNAM WAR

Ali refused to fight in the Vietnam War on religious grounds. He was very vocal in his stand against the Vietnam war: ***"Why should they ask me,"*** he demanded, ***"to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so called Negro people in America are treated like dogs"***. ***"If I thought going to war would bring freedom and equality to 22 million of my people, they wouldn't have to draft me; I'd join***

tomorrow".

He was a man of principle. He sacrificed his title opportunity to make millions of dollars and was willing to go to jail for his beliefs. He symbolised optimism for the most down-trodden person. When asked: ***"What will you do if your appeal fails, will you resist joining the army?"*** Ali replied: ***"My prayers, my sacrifice, my life and my death are all for Allah."*** ***"So I don't see why I should break the rules of my faith and I have no quarrel with the Vietnamese people"***.

ALI AND HIS MISSION

Although mentally as sharp as a razor, Ali now has to face the world through a window of disability though the Noor (light) emanating from his face is a sign that the heart is very much alive. Today, everything in Ali's life is done with a deliberate purpose and that is Islam. He autographs thousands of pamphlets inviting the recipient to Islam. His style of dawah does not preach ideology or marginal issues about religion. Rather it is one of an Islamic example of love, peace and brotherhood. As he once said: ***"I cannot convince, I cannot convert, only Allah can do that."*** ***"I just want to open people's minds so they will think about Allah and Islam."***

ALI IN SOUTH AFRICA

The boxing ring has gone, the handlers have been replaced by business partners in suits and ***"I am the Greatest"*** has been replaced by ***"Allah Akbar"*** (Allah is the Greatest!) As Ali stands behind the bars of Nelson Mandela's cell on Robben Island, he talks about his admiration for the former President of South Africa. He shows some of the old Ali, saying he would have gone crazy in such a small cell. But adds ***"I would have gone to jail for the same thing"***. According to Ali, the key to success of this young democracy is the spread of resources right across the board. The possession of means would see the benefits flowing upliftment.

CONCLUSION

Ali is our hero. Whenever we needed Ali, he was there. When we needed pride, he was it. When we needed victories, he supplied them. The affection for Ali is colour-blind. Ali has reached a point where, when people look at him they do not see black or white. They see Ali. People like Ali come once in a lifetime. He belongs to the World. When asked about his future he replied: ***"Now my life is really starting. Fighting injustice, racism, crime, illiteracy, poverty, using this face that the World knows so well and going out and fighting for truth and other causes. Man must return to a way of life that is harmony with nature and the laws of Allah. My main goal now is helping people and preparing for the Hereafter"***.

Ali in Cote D' Ivoire, West Africa, 1997



THE MUSLIM WORLD

The Muslim population in the world is close to 1.5 billion. Twenty percent (20%) of the Muslims live in the Indian subcontinent, twenty percent (20%) in Sub Saharan Africa, seventeen percent (17%) in Southeast Asia, eighteen percent (18 %) in the Arab world, ten percent (10%) in the former Soviet Republics and China. Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan comprise ten percent (10%) of the non-Arab middle east.

There are between six to eight million Muslims in the United States. Muslim communities can be found in as far and diverse places as the rain forests of Indonesia, the Himalayan Mountains of North India, the deserts in the heart of Africa and the inner cities of America. Every year millions of people from these communities gather in Mecca to stand shoulder to shoulder and pray for peace, justice and equality for all humankind. ***“If God were to judge me just on what I did today, would I go to heaven or hell? Being a true Muslim is the most important thing in the world to me. It means more to me than being black or being American. I can’s save other people’s souls; only God can do that.” (Muhammad Ali)***

If you would like more information on Islam, please contact:

HIGHLIGHTS OF ALI'S LIFE

January	1942	Birth of Cassius W.M. Clay Junior.
September	1960	Wins Gold Medal at Rome Olympics
October	1960	First professional win over Tunny Hunsaker
January	1962	Meets Malcolm X
February	1964	Embraces Islam and changes name to Muhammad Ali
December	1968	Spends time in jail for refusing to enlist with US Army Stripped of title.
March	1972	Performs Haj (Pilgrimage)
October	1974	Regains Heavy Weight Title against George Foreman
	1976	Loses title against Leon Spinks
September	1978	Regains Heavy Weight Title against Leon Spinks
June	1979	Announces Retirement

CONTINUITY OF THE MESSAGE

Islam is not a new religion. It has ties to the same message and guidance that God revealed to all people throughout history:

“Say we (the Muslims) believe in Allah and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and other prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinctions between any of them and to Him we submit.”



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