

THE HOLY PROPHET (PBUH) AS AMBASSADOR OF PEACE

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Abstract

“The Holy Prophet of Islam (PBUH) is the perfect exemplar, the prince of peace, the pride of the universe, whose life is immaculate and whose character is unimpeachable, came into the world as a mercy for all mankind. Yet, for centuries, the opponents of Islam have consistently ignored all that was patently good, noble and beneficent in his life, example and teachings. In Makkan life the Holy Prophet PBUH and his companions faced the opposition and persecution of Quraysh and in Madinan life He (PBUH) laid down the basic principles of an Islamic state. He (PBUH) established an Islamic society based on peace, brother-hood and interfaith harmony. In this discussion, it is focused to give an objective analysis of the fact that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was indeed a Messenger of Peace and Reconciliation. There is also an other misconception being observed in different areas of objective analyses that Islam was based on sword; in this discussion an analogy has been made on the basis of arguments to clarify this misconception.”

Key Words: Islamic Society, Peace, Persecution by the Quraysh, Reconciliation, Jihad

Islam a Religion of Peace

It is a great distinction of the Holy Prophet (saw) that the very religion he founded bears a name the literal meaning of which is “peace”. The word “Islam” indicates the very essence of the religious system known by that name. As Allah Almighty said,

“Verily, only Islam is the religion before Allah.”..... (1)

The teachings of the Holy Prophet (saw) guarantee and establish peace at all levels and in all spheres: individual, social, economic, national and international.

One who becomes a Muslim not only enters a safe haven but also guarantees it for others. The Holy Prophet (saw) defined the Muslim as,

“A Muslim as one whose word or deed cause no harm to others.”..... (2)

Peace’ is the greeting of Muslims and ‘Peace’ shall also be the greeting of the dwellers of Paradise.

Inter-Religious Peace

The great religions of the world are many in form yet one in origin is a truth now widely recognized and accepted but before the advent of the Holy Prophet (saw) that truth was quite unknown. It was from the desert of Arabia and from the mouth the unlettered Prophet (saw) that the great truth was promulgated that our God is the Lord, not of any particular tribe or nation, but of all peoples and all nations and that there is no people who have not been blessed with Divine guidance through prophet hood. As Quran describes,

“And the infidels say, ‘why has not a sign been sent down upon him from his Lord. You are only a Warner and a guide to every people.’..... (3)

God has been equally merciful and beneficent to all nations. Islam is the only religion which accepts the founders of

all revealed religions as Messengers of God and makes it incumbent upon its followers to believe in all of them. Comb through the pages of all religious scriptures and you will not find a similar teaching in them. A Jew may regard Jesus (as) as a false Prophet, a Hindu may consider Moses (as) a charlatan, but a Muslim leaves the pale of Islam the moment he fails to accept all of them as Prophets of God. This is the most practical step Islam has taken towards creating an atmosphere of peace and goodwill among the followers of various faiths.

Respecting religious sentiments is another invaluable lesson taught to us by the Holy Prophet (saw). There are valuable standards of decency and courtesy the Holy Prophet (saw) required of his followers.

The Charter of Freedom which he granted to St. Catherine's Monastery in Mount Sinai in 628, the 6th year of Hegira, is, perhaps, the best illustration the Holy Prophet's desire for inter-religious peace. This monumental document is unprecedented in the history of mankind. It states:

"This is the document which Muhammad, the son of Abdullah, God's Prophet, Warner and Bearer of glad tidings has caused to be written so that there should remain no excuse for those coming after. I have caused this document to be written for the Christians of the East and West, for those who live near, and for those of the distant lands, for the Christians living at present and for those who will come after, for those Christians who are known to us and for those as well whom we do not know.

Any Muslim violating or distorting what has been ordained will be considered to be violating God's Covenant and will be transgressing against His Promise and by doing so, will incur God's wrath, be he a monarch or an ordinary subject. I promise that any monk or wayfarer who will seek my help on the mountains, in forests, deserts or habitations, or places of worship, I will repel his enemies with my friends and helpers, with all my relatives and with all those who profess to follow me and will defend them, because they are my covenant. And I will defend the covenanted against the persecution, injury and embarrassment of their enemies in lieu of the poll tax they have promised to pay. If they prefer to defend their properties and persons themselves, they will be allowed to do so and will not be put to any inconvenience on that account.

No bishop will be expelled from his bishopric, no monk from his monastery, no priest from his place of worship, and no pilgrim will be detained in his pilgrimage. None of their churches or other places of worship will be desolated or destroyed or demolished. No material of their churches will be used to build mosques or houses for the Muslims; any Muslim doing so will be regarded as recalcitrant to God and His Prophet. Monks and Bishops will be subject to no poll tax or indemnity whether they live in forests or on rivers, in the East or in the West, in the North or in the South. I give them my word of honor. They are on my promise and covenant and will enjoy perfect immunity from all sorts of inconveniences. Every help shall be given to them in the repair of their churches. They shall be absolved of wearing arms. They shall be protected by the Muslims. Let this document not be disobeyed till Judgment Day."..... (4)

This important historical document affirms the Holy Prophet's (saw) sincerity and leaves no room for doubting his disposition to peace.

Social Peace

In the establishment of social peace also, the example of the Holy Prophet (saw) stands aloft as a beacon to illuminate the path to lasting harmony. His teachings provide conditions of peace for all those who heed his admonitions, neighbors and wayfarers, rich and poor, young and old, men and women.

Before the advent of the Holy Prophet (saw), women in Arabia were deprived of their rights and distributed as inheritance. By recognizing the social status of women and their rightful place in society as wives and mothers; by securing their rights in inheritance, in divorce, in the guardianship of children, in the management of the affairs of the family and in worship; the Holy Prophet (saw) established peace in the family on a firm basis.

The momentous address which the Holy Prophet (saw) delivered shortly before his demise, after the performance of what has come to be known the Farewell Pilgrimage, is an epitome of the entire spirit and teaching of Islam. In the course of this address, he had this to say:

"O men, what I say to you, you must hear and remember. All Muslims are as brethren to one another. All of you are equal. All men, whatever nation or tribe they may belong to, and whatever station in life they may hold are equal. Even as the fingers of the two hands are equal, so are human beings equal to one another. No one has any right, any superiority to claim over another. You are as brothers.

O men, your God is One and your ancestor is one. An Arab possesses no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab over an Arab. A white man is in no way superior to a black nor for that is matter a

black man better than a white, but only to the extent to which he discharges his duty to God and man. The most honored among you in the sight of God is the most righteous among you...

Even as this month is sacred, this land inviolate, and this day holy, so has God made the lives, property and honor of every man sacred. To take any man's life or his property, or attack his honor, is as unjust and wrong as to violate the sacredness of this day, this month, and this territory. What I command you today is not meant only for today. It is meant for all time. You are expected to remember it and to act upon it until you leave this world and go to the next to meet your Maker...

What I have said to you, you should communicate to the ends of the earth. Perchance those who have not heard me may benefit by it more than those who have heard."..... (5)

This sermon is an eternal Charter of Peace for all mankind. It shows how deep was the Holy Prophet's concern for the welfare of man and the peace of the world.

Economic Peace

Peace depends on justice and economic progress depends on peace. Economic justice is a beautiful slogan common both to capitalism and socialism. Unfortunately, however, both have failed to do full justice to this golden principle as economic exploitation and unfair practices continue to widen the gap between the rich and the poor.

In the domain of economic peace, the teachings of the Holy Prophet (saw) are also an invaluable source of guidance for us. He took steps to remove vast disparities of wealth and poverty, necessary for the establishment of economic peace.

He enjoined the distribution of inheritance among all heirs – parents, children, widows, brother and sisters – so that no one has the power to bequeath the whole of his property to one person and thereby promote the accumulation of wealth.

He also recognized, in principle, the right of the poor in the wealth of the rich and through the institution of Zakat, he provided for the discharge of all those rights that the poor have in the wealth of the rich, and thus bring about reconciliation between the haves and the have-nots.

The prohibition of interest is central to the economic philosophy of Islam. Allah loves beneficence towards the poor and the needy and the equitable distribution of wealth among people. The system of interest strikes at the heart of these blessings. As Allah says,

"Allah destroys interest and increases charity and Allah loves not any ungrateful big sinner."..... (6)

A study conducted by leading scholars in which they sought alternatives to the interest-based global economy concluded that

"By applying the Islamic approach, a lot of human misery could have been avoided."..... (7)

This shows that the Holy Prophet (saw) had laid the foundations for economic peace.

National Peace

Strained relationship between rulers and the ruled is another factor that can disturb peace. Islam prefers a democratic government but does not preclude any form of government. Failure of governments and political systems, however, can cause misery and disaffection and can ultimately lead to demonstrations, industrial strife, rebellion and disorder.

The teachings of the Holy Prophet (saw) are indispensable for the establishment of national peace. He taught that authority vested in rulers is not their private property but a national trust that must be discharged with absolute justice and that government should be carried out in consultation with the people. On the other hand, he admonished the people to realize that the power to choose their rulers was a gift from God and therefore it should be carefully invested in those who fully deserve it. The Holy Qur'an says:

"Verily, Allah commands you to make over the trusts to those entitled to them, and that, when you judge between men, you judge with justice. And surely excellent is that with which Allah admonishes you! Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing."..... (8)

After vesting authority in deserving rulers, the Holy Prophet (saw) taught that they must be accorded the fullest co-operation and obedience and not to rebel against them. The next verse goes on to say:

"O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey His Messenger and those who are in authority among you."..... (9)

Obedience cuts at the root of all kinds of rebellion and anarchy and by laying absolute emphasis on this the Holy Prophet (saw) laid the foundation for national peace.

International Peace

For the settlement of international disputes, the following verse of the Holy Qur'an is pertinent:

And if two parties of believers fight against each other, make peace between them; then if after that one of them transgresses against the other, fight the party that transgresses until it returns to the command of Allah. Then if it returns, make peace between them with equity, and act justly. Verily, Allah loves the just."..... (10)

This verse serves as an excellent model for the whole world and especially the United Nations. Islam forbids aggression but urges us to fight if failure to fight jeopardizes peace and promotes war. This is the teaching on which peace can ultimately be built and this is the teaching on which the Holy Prophet (saw) based his practice.

Jihad

It is an oft-repeated allegation that Islam was spread by the sword. Such allegations, born out of prejudice and envy, have formed the basis of later claims that Islam is a religion of war and terror. Fair-minded commentators have utterly rejected this false notion of Islam. De L O'Leary, for example, writes:

"History makes it clear, however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most absurd myths that historians have ever repeated."(11)

The facts speak eloquently for themselves. For thirteen long years in Makah after receiving the Call, the Holy Prophet (saw) suffered persecution and privations that were bitter, cruel and sustained. His tiny band of followers also suffered savage cruelties. They bore all these with dignity and decorum, setting the highest example of steadfastness. Never did they offer violence against violence, preferring to migrate from their homeland 200 miles into Medina.

Even then they would not be left in peace. The enemy pursued them with the ostensible aim of wiping out Islam by use of force. It was then and only then that the Holy Prophet (saw) was compelled to take up the sword in defense of truth and freedom of conscience. Failure to fight would have meant the extermination of free belief and the search for truth.

Yet even during conflict, the Holy Prophet (saw) carefully particularized a number of rules of war for his followers intended to ensure that no transgression occurred. They were forbidden from attacking women, children, the elderly and the infirm. They were not to strike terror into the general population and were always to keep in view the possibility of peace. Likewise, they were to be mindful of protecting public buildings, fruit trees, cattle and religious seminaries.

The struggle against the enemies of Islam which appeared utterly hopeless in the beginning was carried to a triumphant consummation when Makah, without any bloodshed, opened its gates to the Holy Prophet (saw) and his companions on the day it was conquered. This conquest of Makkah, this glorious day in the history of Islam, this singular event in the history of mankind affirms more than anything else that our Beloved Prophet (saw) was the true Champion of Peace. Victory did not spoil him. Triumph did not detract from his excellent virtues. Power did not corrupt him. The world witnessed the spectacle of the most magnanimous and generous act of forgiveness of which history furnishes a record. The Holy Prophet (saw) readily granted amnesty to his erstwhile persecutors, the magnanimity of which softened the hardest of hearts. Bitter enemies of the morning became warm friends by midday. Even the most die-hard enemies of Islam could not resist the healing balm so generously and so effectively applied by the Holy Prophet (saw).

Commenting on this conquest of Makkah, the Rev. Bosworth Smith writes:

"Compare all the attendant circumstances, the outrages that proceeded, and the use made by each of his recovered power and we shall then be in a better position to appreciate the magnanimity and moderation of the Prophet of Arabia. There were no proscription lists, no plunder, no wanton revenge. From a helpless orphan to the ruler of a big country was a great transition, yet the Prophet retained the nobility of his character under all circumstances." (12)

Peace between Man and God

Let there remain no doubt that the Holy Prophet (saw) was indeed a Messenger of peace and reconciliation whose greatest achievement in this regard was the establishment of peace between man and God. He was born in an era which was the darkest period of the Dark Ages. Religion, morals and philosophy were all at low ebb.

Arabs were divided into warring factions; he united them in love for each other and for their Creator. They were responding like beasts to their animal urges; he refined their cravings into aspirations for the sublime. They were

idolatrous and lacking in any notion of Divine Unity; he established them as the sincerest worshippers of the One True God. Even then he would continually pray for the salvation of his spiritual progeny. Sinless though he was, he prayed for the forgiveness of our sins. To save us from the fire of Hell, he would stand so long in prayer that his feet would get swollen. He wept for our sake till his breast heaved like a boiling pot and his prayer mat became soaked in tears. He drew unto us the mercy of God; he toiled for His pleasure, again for our sake. He caused us to be wrapped up in the mantle of Allah's grace and the garment of His compassion. In short, he paved the way for us to achieve everlasting peace, communion and union with our Maker.

Conclusion

Nothing seems more ironical than that the Prophet who was born in Makkah, known as *Balad-ul-Ameen*, that is, the Abode of Peace; the Prophet who founded a religion the very name of which means peace; the Prophet who struck at the very root of religious acrimony by requiring his followers to believe in all Prophets of God; the Prophet whose teachings if fully acted upon would bring about an era of perpetual peace in all spheres of life; the Prophet who lit up the path to everlasting peace, communion and union with our God; should be branded the prophet of war whose religion was propagated at the point of the sword.

Every objective study of the life of our Beloved Prophet (saw) affirms his excellent virtues and peaceful disposition. The Christian author, Karen Armstrong, when suggesting how the West could understand Islam, writes:

"Perhaps one place to start is with the figure of Muhammad: a complex, passionate man who sometimes did things that are difficult for us to accept, but who had genius of a profound order and founded a religion and a cultural tradition that was not based on the sword - despite the Western myth and whose name 'Islam' signifies 'peace and reconciliation.' (13)

The great British play righter and author, George Bernard Shaw, concluded:

"Far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the Savior of Humanity. I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it much needed peace and happiness." ... (14)

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