



Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) on Peace and Social Justice

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Abstract

In the modern times Islam is being projected as intolerant towards other faiths and religions. We come across instances of suicide bombers and others killing innocent people almost on daily basis. In the light of Seerah of the True Messenger of Allah, can it be justified? What does Prophet Muhammad's life teach us? What is the ideal versus reality?

This article intends to briefly look at the ideas of peace and justice in Islam and explore their deeper significance in the life of a Muslim. It will discuss and highlight the different aspects of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) life and deeds in respect to the peace and social order in present scenario. The messages of the Prophet which would be viewed and analyzed in this study have multipurpose implications both for the Muslim world and the Western world. World peace needs a proper code of conduct and role model. The teachings of the Prophet provide the desired code of conduct (i.e. the law) and the life of the Prophet is the reference point, the role model. The textual messages in this research are the speeches and treaties that the prophet had with his counterparts, companions and followers. In addition, his orations or sermons that he delivered to address the mankind in general. His skillful use of rhetoric demonstrated his commitment for meaningful competent communication for humankind in general. His speeches demonstrated that he sought to see all humankind from the lens of kindness, modesty, moderation, justice, liberty, gentility, generosity and love. The paper focuses on the argument that the basic teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet (ﷺ) are not inconsistent with modern charters of United Nations. The paper also makes appropriate suggestions for the world social order.

Key Words: Peace, Justice, Islam, Prophet Muhammad, Tolerance, Equality

Introduction

The world today is far from modest as political factions and all sorts of social and economic discrimination have segmented the human race. Injustice is very widespread on this earth. There can be no peace without

the firm establishment of justice. The more you see injustice, the more you realize the importance of establishing justice in the land. When mankind lacks guidance on how to live their lives, the entire structure of society is damaged. Allah (SWT) has sent down the Qur'an as guidance for all of mankind, with all the rules and regulations we need to stay on the right track. Islam is a very complete way of life. Every rule that is good or humanity has been ordained in the Shari'ah of Allah (swt). Everything we need, in order to live successfully, can be found in the Qur'an. Amongst these very important divinely instructed laws is the law of establishing justice. Islam the very name of which means "peace" submission to the will of Allah and ladder on which man can always keep rising morally and spiritually is at all related to tolerance. The Qur'an attaches great value to peace. Peace at the expense of justice is not acceptable to the Qur'an. These two issues peace and justice are not only correlated but complementary to each other. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that you may receive admonition.¹

Historical Background and the Purpose of the Establishment of Justice

Establishing justice is the law of Allah (swt). It is part of the balance which Allah has created as justice lead to the peace in the society. The essence of justice is the recognition that all humans are equal and it means creating harmony. Once we accept the principle of human equality, then we need to reject all racism, nationalism, and ethnocentrism. This is something some people find difficult to accept; but that is the one remedy leading us towards justice and peace.

The findings on the Prophet's values of moderation revealed that he placed a lot of weight on justice. Let's begin from the world's first charter, treaty or constitution or the document of peace called *Mesaq-e-Medina* when "First Islamic State" was established in Medina by the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) after *Hijrat* (migration from *Makkah*).

The "Charter of Medina," written and promulgated by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) for the multi-religious ten thousand-strong citizens of the "City-State" of Medina in 622 A.D is truly a remarkable political-constitutional document. The claim made by Professor M. Hamidullah that it was the first written constitution² in the world is not without basis. Aristotle's Constitution of Athens,³ written on papyrus, discovered by an American missionary in Egypt in 1890 A.D and published in 1891 A.D, was not a constitution. It was an account of the constitution of the city-state of Athens. Other legal writings on the conduct of ancient societies have been found, but none can be described as a constitution. The "Medina

¹ *Al-Qur'an*; 15:90

² The First Written Constitution in the World by Dr Muhammad Hamidullah published by Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1968 A.D.

³ *The Avalon Project*, (tr.) Frederic G. Kenyon, 1996 A.D.

Charter” is the first, and in this it preceded the American Constitution of 1787 A.D, considered by Western authorities as "a landmark document of the Western world ... the oldest written national constitution in operation"⁴ by more than a thousand years! It also preceded the English feudal bill of rights, the Magna Carter of 1215 A.D, by almost six centuries. Although the Charter consists of 47 clauses, but due to different numbering, Prof. Hamidullah counts it to be 52.⁵

The Constitution of Madinah which the Prophet (ﷺ) drew up with the multi-religious community of Madinah, soon after his arrival there, remains a shining model for communities that strive for social justice to this day. It was a magnificent historical document, authored and dictated by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). This document secured and promoted cooperation and alliance among all people of any creed, color, ethnicity, and lineage. And it set down the criterion of righteousness as the basis of distinction. I also guaranteed the freedom of worship to all religious communities. And the spirit evidenced there shone into the hearts of all the followers of the Prophet (ﷺ). That is the spirit of equity, tolerance and understanding. The Prophet (ﷺ) insisted that the lack of tolerance towards the non-Muslims, under Islamic rule, is a grave offense.

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was able to establish a model society based in Madinah, on the firm foundation of universally-recognized moral principles. Among these principles, equality and justice were given supreme importance; and this is evident in the life and practice of the Prophet (ﷺ).

This agreement between the first Muslim community and the Jewish community in Medina shows the sense of justice portrayed in the Prophet’s character in dealing with minorities. It also clearly shows that the Prophet (ﷺ) did not spread Islam, even in the city of Medina, by force; on the contrary, he promoted peaceful co-existence with followers of other faiths, especially Jews and Christians.

Let it be known, if any one (Muslim) commits injustice, insults, aggravates, mistreats, or abuses a person of the People of the Book (protected, by the state or an agreement), he will have to answer me (for his immoral action) on the Day of Judgment.⁶

Peace in society depends on peace within us. According to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ): we must foster the sense of justice within ourselves by creating harmony between our emotions of anger and greed on one the hand, and our reason and intellect on the other hand; between the physical dimension and the spiritual dimension.⁷

A just person is one who controls his anger and his greed by the power of reasoning. This act of controlling one’s anger and greed by the power of reason has been described by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as “the major *Jihad*.”

⁴ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition, 1991.A.D

⁵ The First Written Constitution in the World, p. 9. The translation of the whole text for A. Guillaume's “Life of Muhammad” is appended at the end. pp. 19-20

⁶ Abu-Dawud, Sunan, *Bab Haqaq al-Abbad*

⁷ Al-Bukhari and Muslim, *Sahih*

The Prophet of Islam was ahead of his times in promoting peace and justice in society and in true sense he was the pioneer of justice and peace in the world. It would be worthwhile to look at how he dealt with non-Muslims minorities and with the enemies during the war time because the true worth of a society manifests when it is put under pressure.

The Prophet (ﷺ) and his followers were migrated to Medina due to the maltreatment of Quresh of Mecca where the Muslims were minority. When the torture became unbearable he migrates to Medina, a city in northern Arabia, most of whose inhabitants had already accepted Islam. Once he settled in Medina, the Prophet (ﷺ) realized that there was a minority Jewish community in that city that had no inclination to accept Islam. He met them and invited them to a pact with the Muslims so that each religious group in Medina knew its rights and obligations as well as limitations. Some relevant part of the charter reads as follows:

The Jews who enter into this covenant shall be protected from all insults and vexations; they shall have an equal right as our own people to our assistance and good offices. The Jews of the various tribes...and all other non-Muslim residents of Medina shall form with the Muslims one composite nation

They shall practice their religion as freely as the Muslims. The allies of the Jews shall enjoy the same security and freedom. The guilty shall be pursued and punished. The Jews shall join the Muslims in defending Medina against all enemies. The interior of Medina shall be a sacred place for all who accept this Charter. The allies of the Muslims and of the Jews shall be as respected as the principal parties of this Charter.

Mesaq-e-Medina was no doubt the important document in the Muslim history as it established rules of conduct in society and provided the Muslims a secure atmosphere in Medina but on the other hand one cannot ignore the significance of the Treaty of Hudaibia which placed a remarkable document of peace in the history as it enabled the Muslims of Medina to be relieved from pressure and fear for at least ten years from their traditional enemies in Makkah.

Following the example of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) many rulers in Muslim history maintained peaceful and cordial relations with their non-Muslim citizens. If we were to compare the attitude of the Muslim rulers towards the minorities living under their rule during the nineteenth century—with the attitude of the Europeans and the Americans towards their minorities, I dare to say that the record of the Muslims would be much better. Professor Roderic Davison, a prominent historian of the Ottoman Empire, writes:

It might in fact have been argued that the Turks were less oppressive of their subject people than were Prussians of the Poles, the English of the Irish, or the Americans of the Negroes...There is evidence to show that in this period [i.e., late 19th century], there was

emigration from independent Greece into the Ottoman Empire, since some Greeks found the Ottoman government a more indulgent master [than their own Greek government].⁸

If one studies the medieval history of Europe, one will see that the only model of a peaceful multi-cultural and multi-faith society was Spain under the Muslim rule—a Spain in which Christians, Jews and Muslims lived in peace and harmony.

The Last Sermon of the Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ)

The sermon was delivered on the Ninth Day of Dhul-Hijjah, 10 A.H. (632 A.D) in the 'Uranah valley of Mount Arafat in Makkah. It was the occasion of the annual rites of Hajj (the pilgrimage). It is also known as the Farewell Pilgrimage.

The charter of the UN on Human Rights was written in the 1940's A.D, but the human rights in Islam were recognized, declared and executed for over 1400 years. Every place one reads in the farewell sermon of the Prophet Muhammad, will find clearly the declaration of human rights. This declaration is summarized as follows:

1. Freedom to all;
2. Sanctity of life, wealth and property;
3. Equality of all races;
4. Justice in front of the law and in front of ALLAH;
5. Women's rights and obligations. They were to be treated as partners but not as subjects.
6. No exploitation or monopoly. The rich is not to be richer while the poor is to be poorer.
7. Rights of others are to be preserved and to be delivered.
8. People are to take this declaration seriously, they are to preach it and to practice it too, everywhere they go or move.
9. Sanctity of Life and Property;

The sanctity of life and property was pronounced clearly by the Prophet (ﷺ) in his farewell speech. People are to be protected, their lives are to be preserved and their properties are to be saved.

10. Abolition of Usury

The concept of economic exploitation is totally prohibited in Islam. Usury is a form of economic exploitation; therefore, Islam prohibited this type of business. Because of such economic monopoly and exploitation in a capitalistic system, the rich will become richer and the poor will become poorer.

11. Rights and Duties of Man and Women

In his farewell speech, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) spelled out the best declaration for women's rights. He demanded that the husbands should treat the wives with kindness and gentleness. Men are to know that their women are their partners.

8 Roderick H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963 A.D) p. 116.

In short, throughout the emphasis is on building cordial social relations; between man and wife, between individual members of the community and between all sections and classes of the society. These directives aim at forging a mutually cordial and trustworthy community life, ensuring peaceful co-existence among all the constituents of the society. Social justice is distinctly the unmistakable and overarching tenor of the Sermon.

Charter of Privileges with the monks of Mount Sinai

In 628 A.D. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) granted a Charter of Privileges to the monks of St. Catherine Monastery in Mt. Sinai. It consisted of several clauses covering all aspects of human rights including such topics as the protection of Christians, freedom of worship and movement, freedom to appoint their own judges and to own and maintain their property, exemption from military service, and the right to protection in war.

Instructions related to neighbors and prisoners of war.

An Islamic injunction about loving and caring for a neighbor covers all kinds of neighbors irrespective of religion:

*Worship Allah and do not associate anything with Him, and be good to the parents and to the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the neighbor who is your relative, the neighbor who is not your relative, the fellow traveler, the wayfarer and the slave. Verily Allah does not love one who behaves proudly and boastfully.*⁹

Even if a Muslim's parents are non Muslims, Islam – the religion of monotheism– instructs him to respect and be kind to them. Almighty Allah says in the Qur'ān:

*And if they [that is, your parents] insist on you to associate (an idol) with Me... then do not obey them; however, live with them in this world kindly...*¹⁰

The Quranic instructions regarding the maintenance of justice when dealing with the enemies is noteworthy.

*O you who believe, be maintainers of justice (and bearer of) witness for (the sake of) Allah. Let not hatred of a people incites you to act unjustly; be just—this is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah surely Allah is aware of what you do.*¹¹

The first battle in the Muslim history is of significant value. It took place in the 2nd year Hijra between the Muslims of Medina and the polytheists of Mecca. Even though outnumbered and ill-equipped, the Muslims defeated the Meccans and took seventy prisoners of war.

The norm among all societies at that time was to either kill the People of War or make them slaves. But Prophet Muhammad instructed the Muslims to treat the People of War humanely; they were brought back

⁹ Al-Qur'an, 4:36

¹⁰ Al-Qur'an 31:15

¹¹ Al-Qur'an, 5:8

safely to Medina and given decent lodging in the houses of the people who had taken them prisoners. The Qur'ān decreed that the People of War must not be maltreated in any way.

The way the Prophet dealt with the prisoners was very revolutionary. The poor prisoners were released free; those who came from wealthy families of Makkah were returned for a specified ransom (*Fidyah*).¹² But the most interesting case was of those prisoners who were literate – the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) made a deal with them that they could go free if they could teach ten Muslim children how to read and write. Even the rules of engagement during war are also important. Whenever Muslims embarked on the minor Jihād, a defensive *Jihād*, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had standard instructions regarding non-combatants and also the environment:¹³

- I. “Do not violate the treaties.”
- II. “Do not kill an old person or a child or a woman.”
- III. “Do not cut down a tree.”
- IV. “Neither burn down the palm-trees nor drown them with water.”
- V. “Do not cut down a tree bearing fruits.”
- VI. “Do not drown the plantations.”
- VII. “Do not poison the water of the infidels.”¹⁴

According to a Western biographer of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), Sir William Muir:

In pursuance of Muhammad's (ﷺ) commands, the citizens of Medina...received the prisoners and treated them with much consideration. ‘Blessings be on the men of Medina,’ said one of the prisoners in later days, ‘they made us ride, while they themselves walked, they gave us wheaten bread to eat when there was little of it; contenting themselves with dates.’¹⁵

All this was done fourteen hundred years ago, long, long before the Geneva Convention came about. The Prophet (ﷺ) was careful in taking all measures to avoid dispute, anger, or other negative feelings between him and others. In fact, the essence of the Quranic view was:

Here is a Prophet living in your midst exemplifying the truth of all the earlier scriptures. This book and this Prophet (ﷺ) came to confirm the truth of all the revelations before them or the truth of all revealed religions.¹⁶

¹² *Al-Qur'an*, 47:4

¹³ Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Justice, Peace and Prophet Muhammad*, North American Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO), 2006. A.D.

¹⁴ Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Justice, Peace and Prophet Muhammad*, North American Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO) 2006. A.D

¹⁵ Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Justice, Peace and Prophet Muhammad*, North American Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO) 2006. A.D

¹⁶ *Al-Qur'an* 2:139

John Davenport in his book mentioned that:

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the greatest pioneer of religious freedom and tolerance. When I say it, I literally mean it, for it would take history more than 1000 years to produce anything, remotely equal to the covenant that he gave to the Christian monks of Mount Sinai and to the Christians in general, in generosity and tolerance. By the grace of Allah, I have found the complete record of the Covenant in Christian sources.¹⁷

About our beloved Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), George Bernard Shaw wrote that:

I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving the problems in a way that would bring it the much needed peace and happiness.¹⁸

Conclusion

Today Islam enter into a new changing scenario. The civilization of Islam has crumbled, and the customary institutions that formerly sustained and propagated Islamic doctrines—and sidelined Islamic extremism—have been devastated. We require beyond ever earlier, to study and follow the model design that the Prophet (ﷺ) has established for us. We are certainly at crossroads and time has come to put on the principles of Islam and confirmed in practice. Various persons among us who are in spiritual and moral stagnation required to reexamine our opinions and redesign our lives in the light of the *Sirah* to head in the direction of the fair society. Those extremists who indiscriminately hurt and kill innocent civilians, needs to be challenged and that challenge should be imposed on the fundamentalist all sections, creeds of the world are they may be the Jews in Israel, the Christians of southern America who grounded their opinions on theological grounds however occupying the Muslim countries and declare it a “Just War” after 9/11 or any other community. To which way we are proceeding? We must take a pause and raise this query to ourselves so as to we direct our lives in the way we desire. Surely if do not do this nowadays, we shall not ever be able to do it tomorrow.

Endnotes:

1. *Al Quran*; 15:90
2. The First Written Constitution in the World by Dr Muhammad Hamidullah published by Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1968 A.D.
3. *The Avalon Project*, (Tr) Frederic G. Kenyon, 1996 A.D.
4. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition, 1991.A.D
5. The First Written Constitution in the World, p. 9. The translation of the whole text for A. Guillaume's “Life of Muhammad” is appended at the end. pp. 19-20
6. Abu-Dawud, Sunan, *Bab Haqqaq al-Abbad*

¹⁷ John Davenport. An apology for Mohammed and the Koran London : Dryden Press. 1869. Pages 147-151

¹⁸ George Bernard Shaw, *The Genuine Islam*, 1936, vol. 1 No. 8

7. Al-Bukhari and Muslim, *Sahih*
8. Roderick H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963 A.D) p. 116.
9. *Al-Qur'an*, 4:36
10. *Al-Qur'an* 31:15
11. *Al-Qur'an*, 5:8
12. *Al-Qur'an*, 47:4
13. Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Justice, Peace and Prophet Muhammad*, North American Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO), 2006. A.D.
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6. The First Written Constitution in the World, p. 9. The translation of the whole text for A. Guillaume's Life of Muhammad is appended at the end. pp. 19-20.
7. Translated by Frederic G. Kenyon, Internet. 1996 The Avalon Project.