

QUEST FOR GLOBAL PEACE: CONTEXTUALIZING THE ROLE OF PROPHET MUḤAMMAD'S SUNNAH

Mohd. Ashraf Malik

Department of Religious Studies, Central University of Kashmir

*ashrafamin121@gmail.com

Article Info

Submitted : June 26, 2023

DOI: 10.20885/ijis.vol7.iss1.art3

Accepted : June 22, 2024

Published : June 30, 2024

Abstract

The world we live in has everything to offer but peace. While the Western and European countries wrestle with calamities like sexual anarchy, drug abuse, broken marital relationships, the Asian countries are torn-apart by violence, extremism and civil wars. The race for armaments among nations, misuse of nuclear weapons, miscarriage of justice, ruthless use of military force, and exploitation of natural resources by powerful countries is all happening under the nose of United Nation's Security Council and the International Court of Justice. The greatest challenge staring at humanity is to seek the underlying cause of violence in their societies and global levels. It requires a world-wide collaboration and collective efforts to ensure enduring peace at local and international levels. To make peace a reality, humanity has to seek for the harmony at grass-root levels. In this context, the role of one of the greatest benefactors of humanity-Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) is productive and comprehensive. The Prophet (PBUH) ushered peace at all the levels of the society as was reflected in his conduct and behavior. In this paper, I seek to contextualize the role of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) in building up the peace within humanity. Some glaring examples from the life of the Prophet (PBUH) may be cited that will help in addressing the grave challenges of insecurity and violence in the world. The paper suggests for the adoption of the practices and principles of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) that would go a long way to nurture peace among individuals and societies.

Keywords: Prophet Muḥammad, Peace, Security, Tolerance, Harmony

INTRODUCTION

When we sit down and think, human civilization as a whole, we are marveled by the achievements and strides, we have made. Cruising through the airless boundaries of space and landing on the moon, drilling into the heart of the earth to utilize the geo-thermal energy, diving into the darkest circles of the sea to find the wonderful world of sea-creatures, bombarding the tiniest atom to unleash the enormous energy, taming the waves of air to break the communication barriers, all this makes us proud and mighty. But as soon as we are overwhelmed by the joy of technological achievements, a pale of gloom surrounds us! We seem losers amidst victory! The success that we register appears meaningless! It reminds us of Martin Luther King Jr., who had exclaimed: “When we look at modern man, we have to face the fact...that modern man suffers from a kind of poverty of the spirit, which stands in glaring contrast to his scientific and technological abundance; We have learned to fly in the air like birds, we have learned to swim the seas like fish, and yet we have not learned to walk on the Earth...”(Luther King Jr., n.d.). In fact we as a humanity have been unable to celebrate our achievements collectively. Mistrust, indifference, contempt, envy, hatred, disunity pervades our affairs. In a word, we are devoid of peace. Spiritual and moral bankruptcy reigns high with us. The world at the beginning of the 21st century, characterized by wars, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), environmental disruption, AIDS and other infectious diseases, has become “a century of violence” which seems worryingly more violent than the last century. As rightly put by National Committee for Peace Research, the Science Council of Japan: “Now over fifteen years after the end of the Cold War between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., the world appears to be in an even more dangerous situation, both chaotic and unpredictable. It seems that almost anything could happen at any time, anywhere.”(Okamoto 2005). The recent Russian-Ukraine war sent shock waves through the spine of every nation. Europe saw the worst refugee crisis only after WWII in 1945. The wars fought on land and border issues as is the case with

India and Pakistan, China and India, etc. and the loss of and displacement of human lives calls for a remedy. Millions of Syrian, Somalian, Palestinian, Rohingya refugee crises must shake our conscience. We as a world community must gear up for the rehabilitation of such appalling victims. And also pledge not to yield to the actions that give rise to the catastrophes of such nature. The horrible crimes, exploitation and aggression of the vulnerable at the hands of powerful make our planet dreadful. Such a grim scenario of human affairs demands serious thought and consideration. The importation and adoption of problem-solving models and principles coming down the ages from men of wisdom becomes the need of an hour. Let us explore the expediency of the principles and actions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in mitigating the conflicts and addressing the challenges of dwindling peace and rising insecurity in the world.

PROPHET MUḤAMMAD (PBUH) AND PEACE-BUILDING

Human beings are born with the tendencies and instincts of anger and violence as much as they are born with the dispositions of love and mercy. The faculties of head and heart can be used or misused. There are ways and means to do good and equally the means and potential to do the otherwise. The honing of intellect to breed goodness and reflect righteousness requires a potent motivation transcending self-centeredness. Disciplining of self is an uphill task and so is the chaining of desires. Suppressing the instincts of enmity, hate, jealousy, bias calls for an enduring philosophy and wisdom. The collective global peace is a possibility only when one has better alternatives against violence and transgression. If the policy of *end justifies the means* is exercised, then one must not expect peace in the world.

The Arabian society where Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) was born was chaotic, anarchistic, vice-prone, and full of insecurity and fear. Desecration of womanhood, eve-teasing, adultery, maltreatment of slaves, alcoholism, tribal wars, plunder, gambling formed the chief characteristics of that society. For the

mighty, oppressing the weak seemed a norm, and to the oppressed, suffering appeared as an irresistible fate. The Prophet (PBUH) was commissioned to reform such a society. He had to start from zero for the initiatives of peace and reforms were mocked at by the inhabitants of Arabia. He was but a committed man and Prophet (PBUH) fortified with the powerful message and promise of the Divine. The genius of the Prophet (PBUH) as a peace-maker had already unfolded in his youth and adulthood prior to his *Nabuwwah*. He had by the dint of his honesty and uprightness earned the honorific titles of *al-Amīn*, and *al-Sādiq* already (Al-Qarni, n.d.). Fifteen years prior to his *Nabuwwah*, the haughty leaders of Quraysh had made him their arbiter in the incident of placing *Hajr al Aswad* on the walls of sacred *Ka'ba* and had been pleased with his decision that had prevented a huge ensuing violence (Hasan Ali Nadwi 1993). The Prophet (PBUH) always felt proud of attending and adhering to the principles of the historic *Hilf al Fudūl* (The Pact of the Virtuous) worked upon in the house of 'Abdullah ibn Jud'an (Ramadan 2007). The Prophet had later exclaimed that he was not ready to exchange the honor of being the member of such chivalrous order against a herd of red camels, and that he was ready to rush to the help if he was called for [the initiative of such nature]! (Hamidullah, n.d.). The cultivation, revival, retention and strengthening of peace and order among people formed the chief concerns of the Prophet. He would partake in the peace-process wherever the efforts for the work heralded. The teaching of the Qur'an: "... Help you one another in *al-Birr* and *al-Taqwa* [virtue, righteousness and piety]; but do not help one another in *al-Ism* and *al-Udwān* [sin and transgression]..." (Q. S. *Al-Maidah*, n.d.) was already ingrained in the consciousness of the Prophet. However the real genius of peace was unfolded in the Prophet as he was honored by God with the *Nabuwwah*. The methodology and approach that the Prophet undertook for generating and sustaining peace in his society require our due attention.

The life of the Prophet since his *Nabuwwah* in 610 CE was guided by revelation in the form of *Qur'an*. Allah provided for the *Hidāyah* of the Prophet,

and then through his exemplary conduct manifested *Hidāyah* to the humanity. The making of a peaceful and ordered society that the Qur'an aimed at would have required an ideal personality who could comprehend, imbibe and display the peaceful message of the Scripture, and then arrange for the peace in the lives of his followers; the Qur'an found Muḥammad as the model personality for that noble mission. The person of Prophet Muḥammad shouldered the responsibility with patience, forbearance and caution. The Prophet followed the principles of the Qur'an in letter and spirit. The teachings of the Qur'an prescribed a systematic progressive model towards the purification of human soul and community at large. The implementation of Qur'anic teachings by the Prophet with sincerity, wisdom, patience, prudence, of course with consistency helped in attending to the human nature in the most appropriate manner.

Syed Abul Hasan Nadwi remarks about Prophet Muḥammad as, "He was benign and benevolent and was very careful and considerate in dealing with people. He always took into consideration man's natural weaknesses of at times becoming dull, unenthusiastic and uninspiring. That is why, he delivered sermons with a gap of time so that people did not get tired." (S. A. H. A. Nadwi 1998). The Qur'an we know did not come down at once but piece-meal in 23 years of the Prophetic life as Qur'an says, "*We have revealed this Qur'an little by little so that you may recite it to people at intervals, and we have revealed it gradually.*" (*Q. S. Al-Isra'*, n.d.). And in the first 13 years at *Makkah*, the aim of the Qur'an was determined to construct and strengthen the element of *īmān*. The faith rested predominantly on three fundamental aspects— *Tawhīd* (Unity of God), *Risālah* (Prophethood), *Ākhirah* (Judgement Day). Once the faith in such three facets was cemented and the Islamic world-view was established, good deeds and virtuous acts issued forth. According to Ayesha, one of the wives of the Prophet: The first thing revealed in the Qur'an is a detailed *Surah* replete with the mention of the heaven and the hell, until such time when people (in large numbers) entered the fold of Islam, the injunctions relating to *Halāl* (approved) and *Harām* (prohibited)

were revealed. If at the very outset, they had been ordered to abstain from drinking, the people would have said that they would not give it up; and if it was ordained that they should keep away from fornication, they would have said that they would never refrain from it (Islahi 2009).

The Prophet of Islam worked for the peace at the grass-root levels. He relentlessly worked for *Tazkiyah* for himself and his followers. His principle was that once a believer takes control of the temptations of the self like greed, envy, pride, and hatred, he/she attains peace within and without. The love of Allah arouses in him the love for truth, justice, equity, brotherhood, and cooperation; on the other hand, the sense of accountability in the court of Allah *Yawm al Dīn* prevents him in indulging in vices. The Prophet led from the front, he developed a deep passion for good deeds for the sake of Allah and trained his followers on the same lines. The fervor instilled by the Prophet for virtues was so intense that the vices like lying, backbiting, gossiping, greed, slandering, quarrelling, envying, theft, gambling, alcoholism, racial pride, etc. were seen with contempt. The Prophet in fact was bringing out the essence of “Islam” i.e. making of peace with one’s own self by submitting one’s will to Allah, Who is the source of all purity and goodness, and making peace with fellow beings, by doing good to them. Hence the Qur’anic verse: “*Nay, whoever submits himself entirely to God, and is the doer of good to others, he has his reward from his Lord...*” (Q. S. *Al-Baqarah*, n.d.). The centrality of peace is reflected in the daily greetings of the Muslims as “*As-Salamu Alykum*”, ‘Peace be upon you’. Indeed the Qur’an has very interesting to say in this regard, “*And the servants of Allah, the most gracious are those who walk the earth in humility and when others address them, they say ‘peace’*” (Q. S. *Al-Furqan*, n.d.). On being asked, what is the best in Islam, the Prophet is reported to have said as, “*Feeding others and giving the greeting of Salām to those whom you know and those who you don’t know.*”(Q. S. Khan 2012).

The sustainability of peace, order, and justice within the human society was of paramount importance to the Prophet. The individual acts of piety and worship were subordinated to the works of social welfare undertaken by a believer. In other words, the criterion for measuring internal peace of a person was to be measured by the peace he maintains with others. The Prophet is reported to have made the following remarks, “*Should I [Prophet] not tell you something that is better than [voluntary/optional] Fasting, Salah and Charity?*’ They [The Sahābah] said: ‘Yes.’ He said: ‘*Reconciling and making peace between people, for spoiling relations is the shaver [destroys Dīn and good]* (Al-Bukhari, n.d.). *Whoever would love to be saved from Hellfire and entered into Paradise then let him die with faith in Allah and the Last Day and let him treat people the way he would love to be treated.*” (Sahih Muslim, n.d.). The Prophet talks about peace in broader terms and offers it much wider connotations. The work-plan of the Prophet for peace begins with the individual and then runs through the society to further engage the whole of humanity. When the notion of peace comes to our mind, we must be reminded of the broader dimensions of the term peace that the Prophet attached to it for peace (*Salām*) means not merely an absence of war; it includes the elimination of the grounds for strife or conflict, and resulting waste and corruption (*fasād*) it create. Wahiduddin Khan makes an important remark, “We often talk of peace in the context of war. But this is a very narrow and restricted notion of peace. Peace is deeply linked with the entirety of human life. Peace is a complete ideology in itself. Peace is the only religion for both—man and the universe. It is the master-key that opens the doors to every success. Peace creates a favorable atmosphere for success in every endeavor. Without peace, no positive action—small or big—is possible.” (M. W. Khan 2017). The complete expression of human potential is possible only in an atmosphere pregnant with love, respect and compassion among human beings. The real index of happiness is the spirit of peace existent in a human society. No accomplishment is greater than peace, and no peace is possible without a powerful and enduring

ideology and world-view. Such lasting and engaging message could only be inherited from the rich and pervading Prophetic Traditions. Syed Sulaiman Nadwi observes that Man requires the light of his past experiences to brighten his present and future. All the different sections of humanity that have done anything to make this world a better place to live in deserve our gratitude; but, the most deserving of our regard are those whom we call the prophets of God. Each one of them has, in his own time, presented a winsome example of his sublime conduct and moral behavior. If one was a model of endurance, others were emblems of selflessness, sacrifice, chastity and piety, etc. In short, each of them was a lighthouse of guidance showing the path of exalted behavior in one or the other walk of life. Man, however, stood in the need of another guide who could illuminate the entire gamut of human behaviour, in all its manifoldness, by his comprehensive example of goodness and virtue. And, this exemplar did come to the world in the person of the last of the prophets, Muhammad (PBUH), on whom be peace and blessings of the Lord (S. S. Nadwi 1977).

CONCLUSION

The contemporary world is in tremendous peace-crises. The absence of tranquility among the individuals of a society is reflected in the surging graphs of suicide and self-harm world-wide. Civil wars, internal strife, race for armaments, ecological imbalance, and exploitation of the resources, economic disparity, injustice and poverty are unfolding immeasurably. The matter calls for immediate attention if the humanity has to survive! It requires a compelling and lasting policy and planning. All the stakeholders especially the prominent peace organizations of the world like United Nations, Human Rights Watch, International Peace Bureau, United Religions Initiative, Mayors for Peace, International Crisis Group, Food not Bombs, etc. should come hand in hand to deal with the challenges of insecurity, fear and injustice overwhelming us. Nipping the evil in the bud must be the primary requisite. Nations must be taught cooperation than competition.

Self-interests must not be celebrated over human life; no person be belittled on the bases of ethnicity, resources and status. Human resource as a whole be respected and valued. The means of cultivating peace and nurturing compassion must be revisited and all the wisdom coming down the ages from Prophets, saints and seers be embraced with open heart.

In the pursuit of peace, the role of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), the Prophet of Mercy as Qur'an calls him stands very prominent and comprehensive. His precepts and conduct (*Sunnah*) are vital in building up peace at the grass-root levels. There are many remarkable accomplishments of *Rasūl Allah* that could be taken as the prototypes to nurture peace at grass-root levels. Some of the selected examples are the character building of his followers (*Sahāba*) at *Makkah* (Çelik, Öztürk, and Kaya 2020), the Charter of *Madīnah* (*Mithāq al-Madīnah*) (Islam 1996), Establishment of Brotherhood (*Muwakhāt*) among emigrants of *Makkah* and residents of *Madīnah* (*Muhajirīn* and *Ansār*) (Khanam 2006), Treaty of Hudaibiyah (Mubarakpuri, n.d.), Conquest of *Makkah* (Azzam and Gouverneur, n.d.), and Pact with the Christians of Najrān (Ramadan 2007). Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) ability to conclude treaties, to send diplomats, to have rights and duties under international law, and to claim for reparation were proofs that he was an internationally engaging person with a concern for peace on global level (Kamal 2017).

Muslim countries have to take an active part in all the peace processes and initiatives across the globe. The Muslim *Ummah* as universal and trans-national entity has to brace up for employing the Prophetic model of peace in their societies and lead by an example. They are no doubt one of the major stake-holders in making peace among nations. They can't afford losing the confidence and promise of all peace-making and peace-loving organizations. The Western countries on the other hand need to open to the wisdom of the Prophetic teachings to get rid of the evils besieging humanity on all sides. The world's super-powers whom everyone looks for the refuge from social, political, and economic

insecurity must not neglect the instruments of change that may come their way. The challenge then is as hinted out by Hamza Yusuf, “It is not whether Islam is compatible with Western values or not, but instead whether the West can truly embrace Islam. And this is a very valid challenge to a so-called and self-prided multicultural and all inclusive West (Vehapi 2013).

REFERENCES

- Al-Bukhari, Imam. n.d. *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad: Panduan Adab Dan Akhlak Harian Seorang Muslim*. Ummul Qura. Accessed 12 September 2017.
- Al-Qarni, Aid ibn Abdullah. n.d. *Muhammad: As If You Can See Him*. International Islamic Publishing House.
- Azzam, Leila, and Aisha Gouverneur. n.d. *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*.
- Çelik, Prof Dr Ömer, Dr Mustafa Öztürk, and Dr Murat Kaya. 2020. *An Excellent Exemplar*. Istanbul: Erkam Verlag.
- Hamidullah, Muhammad. n.d. *The Life and Work of the Prophet of Islam*. New Delhi: Adam Publishers. Accessed 24 July 2024. https://www.academia.edu/4040621/The_Life_and_Work_of_the_Prophet_of_Islam.
- Hasan Ali Nadwi, Sayyed Abul. 1993. *Muhammad the Last Prophet*. India: UK Islamic Academy. <https://www.scribd.com/document/633318045/Muhammad-the-Last-Prophet>.
- Islahi, Amin Ahsan. 2009. *Islamic Faith and It's Presentation*. New Delhi: Adam Publishers.
- Islam, Yusuf. 1996. *The Life of the Last Prophet*. 1st edition. Saudi Arabia: Mountain of Light.
- Kamal, Mohd Hisham Mohd. 2017. ‘International Legal Personality of Prophet Muhammad’. *IJUM Law Journal* 25 (2): 161–78. <https://doi.org/10.31436/iiumlj.v25i2.341>.
- Khan, Maulana Wahiddudin. 2017. ‘Spirit of Islam’. *Fathima Sarah*, September 2017.
- Khan, Q. S. 2012. *How to Prosper the Islamic Way*. First Edition. Mumbai: Tanveer Publication.
- Khanam, Dr Farida. 2006. *Life and Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad*. Good Word Books.

- Luther King Jr., Martin. n.d. 'Martin Luther King Jr. Quotes'. *Goodreads* (blog). Accessed 12 January 2017. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=when+we+look+at+modern+man&commit=Search>.
- Mubarakpuri, Safi Al-Rahman. n.d. *Al-Rahiq Al-Makhtum*. Accessed 25 July 2024. <https://qisthipress.com/sirah-nabawiyah-rahiq-al-makhtum-sejarah-nabi-uhhammad-shafiyurrahman-mubarakfuri>.
- Nadwi, Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali. 1998. *Islam: An Introduction*. 1st ed. New-Delhi: Universal Peace Foundation.
- Nadwi, Syed Sulaiman. 1977. *Muhammad: The Ideal Prophet*. Islamic Book Foundation.
- Okamoto, Mitsuo. 2005. 'Tasks of Peace Studies in the 21st Century'. *A Report of National Committee for Peace Research*, July, 1–19.
- Q. S. Al-Baqarah*. n.d.
- Q. S. Al-Furqan*. n.d.
- Q. S. Al-Isra*'. n.d.
- Q. S. Al-Maidah*. n.d.
- Ramadan, Tariq. 2007. *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sahih Muslim*. n.d. 4th ed. 1844. Accessed 12 September 2017. https://www.iium.edu.my/deed/hadith/muslim/004b_smt.html.
- Vehapi, Flamur. 2013. 'Conflict Resolution in Islam: Document Review of the Early Sources'. *Dissertations and Theses*, September. <https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.1445>.

