

Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) on Peace and Social Justice

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Abstract

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.

It is sufficient to give as evidence that one of Almighty Allah's names is 'Peace'. He, Almighty, wants by this to remind people that He, Most High, is the source of and caller for peace. Furthermore, the greeting exchanged among Muslims is 'Peace, mercy and blessings of Allah be with you'. Likewise, Muslims finish their prayers turning their heads to the right and then to the left, saying each time, 'Peace and mercy of Allah be upon you'.

The Quran attaches great value to peace. Peace at the expense of justice is not acceptable to the Quran. Justice is the gateway to peace. In submitting to God, according to the Quran, we opt for peace over against war and heed the divine command to act with justice in conversation, in business transactions and in treating others hence the concept of justice is one of the pillars in the maintenance of both the natural and social orders.

These two issues peace and justice are not only correlated but complementary to each other.

It is outstanding how many of the transforming initiatives in the farewell Sermon of the Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) is steps in peacemaking.

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 also discuss and highlight the different aspects of Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) life and deeds in respect to the peace and social order in present scenario.

Key Words: *Peace, Justice, Islam, Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H), Tolerance, Equality*

Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) on Peace and Social Justice

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 Quran as guidance for all of mankind, with all the rules and regulations we need to stay on the right track. Islam is a complete way of life. Every rule that is good for humanity has been ordained in the Shariah of Allah (swt). Everything we need, in order to live successfully, can be found in the Quran. Amongst these very important divinely instructed laws is the law of establishing justice.

Allah says in the Quran:

“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.” (Surah An-Nahl: 90)

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.

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 Mohammad (P.B.U.H) after Hijrat (migration from Mecca).

The Medina Charter, written and promulgated by Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) 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 (1968) that it was the first written constitution in the world is not without basis. Aristotle's Constitution of Athens, written on papyrus, discovered by an American missionary in Egypt in 1890 and published in 1891, was not a constitution (Frederic G. Kenyon 1996).

It was an account of the constitution of the city-state of Athens. Several writings on the conduct of ancient societies have been found, but none can be described as a constitution. The Medina Charter is the first, and in this it paved the way the American Constitution of 1787, considered by Western authorities as "a landmark document of the Western world ... the oldest written national constitution in operation" (New Encyclopaedia Britannica 1991) by more than a thousand years! It also preceded the English feudal bill of rights, the Magna Carter of 1215, by almost six centuries. Although the Charter consists of 47 clauses, but due to different numbering, Prof. Hamidullah counts it to be 52 (Dr. Mohammad Hamidullah 1968).

The Constitution of Madinah which the Prophet (P.B.U.H) drew up with the multi-religious community of Madinah, soon after his migration from Makkah, remains a shining model for communities that venture for social justice to this day. It was an outstanding and landmark historical document, authored and uttered by Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). This document secured and advance cooperation and alliance among all people of any creed, color, ethnicity, and lineage. And the spirit evidenced

there shone into the hearts of all the followers of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). That is the spirit of equity, tolerance and understanding. The Prophet is the advocate of the tolerance towards the non-Muslims and considered the intolerance a great offense.

Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) 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 (P.B.U.H).

This agreement between the first Muslim community and the Jewish community in Medina shows the sense of justice portrayed in the Prophet's (P.B.U.H) character in dealing with minorities. It also clearly shows that the Prophet (P.B.U.H) 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." (Abu-Dawud).

Peace in society depends on peace within us. According to Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H): 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.

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 Mohammad (P.B.U.H) as 'the major jihād'.

The Prophet (P.B.U.H) 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 frequent readiness to forgive the enemy is the trait of the Prophet's (P.B.U.H) character. Wherever there is wrong the Prophet (P.B.U.H) removed it by pardon.

The Prophet (P.B.U.H) 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 migrated to Medina, a city in northern Arabia, most of whose inhabitants had already accepted Islam. Once he settled in Medina, the Prophet (P.B.U.H) 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:

1. And verily those who will obey us from among the Jews will have help and equality; neither shall they be oppressed nor shall any help be given against them.
2. And verily the Jews of the Banu Awf shall be considered as a community (ummah) along with the Believers, for the Jews being their religion and for the Muslims their religion, be one client or original member of the tribe; but whosoever shall be guilty of oppression or violation (of treaty), shall put to trouble none but his own person and the members of his house (ahlbayt).
3. The Jews must bear their expense and the Muslims must bear their expenses. They help one another against those who make war against the people of this document. Between them is good understanding, honourable dealing, and honesty, not treachery. No one is responsible for his confederate. Help [is to be given] to whoever is wronged.

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. It put an end to the prevailing anarchy and protected the life, liberty, property and religious freedom of all people included in the accord. It created a state where equal rights and responsibilities were truly provided for all citizens 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. The Treaty brought about the moral and political victory of Islam all over Arabia

Although every aspect of the Prophet's (P.B.U.H) Seerat is an inspirational for the Muslims, it is deemed necessary that the present generation understands the event of the Truce of Hudaibiya. This is more so that the enmity is upbraiding different groups of Muslims to create division among them and weaken them through internal disputes.

The prime example of this plot of the adversaries was the Gulf War which was originated by them and in the end very cleverly they put the blame directly on the disputants. The enemy derived full benefit at the cost of the warring groups. Therefore it is high time that one study in depth the terms of the Truce of Hudaibiya and the circumstances that led to the truce and those which followed thereafter. Some of the immediate benefits which resulted from this treaty were that in the first place it opened the avenue of amicable contacts between the peoples of Makkah and Medina. Traffic was opened between the

two cities and men separated for long from their family began to meet freely with one another. Matters were discussed and the misunderstandings which the people of Makkah had about the Prophet (P.B.U.H) and the Muslims came forward and were cleared. Thus to conclude such a peace which brought such bitter enemies as the Quraish on the path of peace and harmony was the wisest stroke of the Prophet's (P.B.U.H) policy.

Following the example of Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) 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]." (1963:116)

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.

Prophet Mohammad's (P.B.U.H) Farewell Sermon

The farewell sermon was delivered on the Ninth Day of Dhul-Hijjah, 10 A.H. (632 CE) 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. It should be noted here that this sermon was given shortly before the death of the Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) so it can be justifiably considered as His last will and testament.

The charter of the UN on Human Rights was written in the 40's, 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 Mohammad (P.B.U.H), will find clearly the declaration of human rights. The Farewell message delivered by Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) is laconic and includes all points that are relevant to the present-day scenario. This 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, and everywhere they go or move.
- 9- Sanctity of Life and Property

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

11. Abolition of Usury

The concept of economic exploitation is totally prohibited in Islam. Usury is a form of economic exploitation where in the capital of wealth circulates among few hands; 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.

12. All bloodshed in the pagan period left unavenged.
13. Rights and Duties of Man and Women.

In his farewell speech, the Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) 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.

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 C.E. Prophet Mohammad's (P.B.U.H) 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. The Charter which the Prophet granted to the Christian monks of Sinai still exists. It breathes not only goodwill but actual love. He gave to the Jews of

Medina, so long as they were faithful to him, precisely the same treatment as to the Muslims.

This remarkable document, the Charter of Privileges, which has been faithfully preserved by the annalists of Islam, displays a stunning breadth of view and bounty of conception. By it the Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) secured to the Christians privileges and protection which they did not possess even under sovereigns of their own creed; and declared that any Muslim violating and abusing what was therein ordered, should be regarded as a violator of God's testament, a transgressor of His commandments, and a slighter of His faith.

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 neighbour who is your relative, the neighbour who is not your relative, the fellow traveler, the wayfarer and the slave. Verily Allah does not love one who behaves proudly and boastfully.” (Surah an-Nisaa, 4:36)

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'an:

“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...” (Surah al-Luqman, 31:15)

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.” (Surah al-Maida, 5:8)

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 POWs or make them slaves. But Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) instructed the Muslims to treat the POWs humanely; they were brought back safely to Medina and given decent lodging in the houses of the people who had taken them prisoners. The Qur‘ān decreed that the POWs must not be maltreated in any way.

Character and style of life of man can be rightly approximated when he has honor, power and authority. The way the Prophet (P.B.U.H) dealt with the prisoners was very revolutionary. The poor prisoners were released free; those who came from wealthy families of Mecca were returned for a specified ransom (Fidya). (See the Qur‘ān: Surah Mohammad, 47:4) But the most interesting case was of those prisoners who were literate the Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) 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 Mohammad (P.B.U.H) had standard instructions regarding non-combatants and also the environment: (Sayyid Mohammad Rizvi 2006)

- “Do not violate the treaties.”
- “Do not kill an old person or a child or a woman.”
- “Do not cut down a tree.”
- “Neither burn down the palm-trees nor drown them with water.”
- “Do not cut down a tree bearing fruits.”
- “Do not drown the plantations.”
- “Do not poison the water of the infidels.” (ibid)

According to a Western biographer of Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H), Sir William Muir, “In pursuance of Mahomet’s 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.’” (ibid)

All this was done fourteen hundred years ago; long, long before the Geneva Convention came about.

Conclusion

The Prophet (P.B.U.H) 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 came to confirm the truth of all the revelations before them or the truth of all revealed religions."

John Davenport in his book mentioned that

“The Holy Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) 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.” (1869:147-151)

In present era, the only solution to the warfare and conflict going on all over the world is to adopt the morality of the Qur'an, and, like the Prophet (P.B.U.H) (peace be upon him), never to depart from the path of justice, making no distinction between different religions languages, or races. Humanity can attain this goal only when it would accept the leadership of Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) as the only hope of its survival.

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