

Good News

...And give good news to those who do good (to others) - HQ22:37

March 2018

A Publication of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement for the Propagation of Islam South Africa

Vol. 009 No. 003

Muhammad - 'Human Rights' – Personified

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The entire life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s¹) was a literal personification of 'human rights'. Like no other, he truly championed the cause of humanity.

Early Life in Makkah

For thirteen years in Makkah the Prophet Muhammad and his small band of followers faced the worst kind of oppression and torture at the hands of the dominant Quraish tribe and their allies. Many Muslims were cruelly butchered merely because they professed their faith in Islam, the universal Religion of Peace which Muhammad came to revive and bring to perfection under Divine guidance. Yet, Muhammad himself never retaliated or taught his followers to retaliate but rather advised the most vulnerable and

weaker ones to seek refuge in a safer country such as Abyssinia.

Flight to Abyssinia

When the refugees reached Abyssinia, they were pursued by their blood-thirsty enemy. Jafar ibn Abi Talib, the head of the Muslim refugees addressed the King in words, which gave the world a permanent insight into the iconic humanitarian characteristics of that noble soul, the Prophet Muhammad (s):

O King! We were an ignorant people, given to idolatry. We used to eat corpses even of a dead animal, and do all kinds of disgraceful things. We did not make good our obligations to our relations and ill-treated our neighbours. The strong among us would thrive at the expense of the weak, till, at last, God sent a prophet for our reformation. His descent, his righteousness, his integrity and his piety are well-known to us. He called us to the worship of God and exhorted us to give up idolatry and stone

¹ *Sallah lahu alay wassallam* –peace and blessings of God be upon him

worship. He enjoined us to speak the truth, to make good our trusts, to respect ties of kinship, and to do good to our neighbours. He taught us to shun everything foul and to avoid bloodshed. He forbade all manner of indecent things – telling lies, misappropriating orphans' belongings, and bring a false accusation against the chastity of women. So we believed in him, and followed him and acted upon his teachings. Thereupon our people began to wrong us, to subject us to tortures, thinking that we might thus abjure our faith and revert to idolatry. When, however, their cruelties exceeded all bounds, we came out to seek asylum in your country, where we hope shall come to us no harm”²

The Negus, Christian King of Abyssinia, described by the Holy Prophet (s) as a ‘just ruler’ was deeply moved by Jafar’s account of the Holy Prophet (s) and other details of their beliefs that he readily granted them asylum and protection in his

country against their blood-thirsty opponents who pursued them.

The Prophet Muhammad’s forced exile from Makkah

Meanwhile, back in Makkah, the Quraish, in utter despair tried to bribe the Prophet (s) with the following offer:

If your ambition is to possess wealth, we will amass for you as much of it as you wish; if you aspire to win honour and power, we are prepared to swear allegiance to you as our overlord and king; if you have a fancy for beauty, you shall have the hand of the finest maiden of your own choice³

But to their surprise, Muhammad (s) replied:

I want neither riches nor political power. I have been commissioned by God as a Warner to humanity. I deliver His message to you. Should you accept it, you shall have happiness in this life as well as in the life to come; should you reject the word of God, surely God will decide between you and me. ⁴

Muhammad (s) spoke these words when persecution was very severe, which speaks volumes about his character. Had he been driven by lust or power, as some jaundiced-eyed critics would allege, one

² Ali,MM, *Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad*, pp 5-6 ; Guillame, A, translation of Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirat Rasul Allah* pp 155-152

³ Ali, MM, *Muhammad the Prophet* p. 60

⁴ Ali, MM, *Muhammad the Prophet* p. 60

would have expected the history books to show his acceptance of this tempting offer with open arms, with a show of triumphant pride. But no, this was never to be the case with Muhammad (s), Messenger of Allah. Even in the face of an overwhelming life and death struggle, he stood firm. The Holy Quran confirms:

And if We had not made thee firm, thou might have indeed inclined to them a little – 17:74.

The Quraish, now incensed, planned the assassination of the Holy Prophet (s). One member of each tribe, it was agreed, would descend on the Prophet's house at night and stab him with a knife or spear while he was lying in bed asleep. In this way, they schemed, no single tribe could be held responsible for the Prophet's murder. On that ominous night before the murderous plot could be executed, the Holy Prophet (s) and his closest companion, Abu Bakr, secretly left Makkah for Yathrib (a city now known as Madinah), approximately 200 kilometres to the north of Makkah. When he arrived in Madinah after several days of travel through a hot desert, a large contingent of Madinites jubilantly welcomed him and other Makkan refugees who later joined him. The people of Madinah who welcomed him pledged to help him under all circumstances. Their pledge of help was so remarkable that they became known and referred to in the Holy

Quran by Almighty God as the *Ansar*, the Helpers. However, here too the Holy Prophet (s) and his followers were not left alone by the war-mongers of Makkah. Seeing the Muslim numbers swell in Madinah, the bitter Quraish stepped up their opposition to a higher level. They now planned military action to annihilate the Muslims once and for all. At this stage the Muslims, mostly old men and inexperienced youth, were no match for the skilled, military might of the Quraish. A real David and Goliath situation prevailed. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) on the other hand, by his very nature never had any inclination for warfare. If he had then he would most certainly have taken part in the tribal wars that were the order of the day in the society in which he grew up. But the fact that he did not, shows he was never a man of war, but a man of peace even at a young age; yet he was not a coward in the face of danger. Only at the age of 53 years old, when strenuous circumstances threatened the very lives and welfare of the Muslims, he followed the Divine sanction to take up arms for the noble cause of self-defence in order to restore the dignity and secure the safety of his people against an aggressive, bloodthirsty enemy:

Permission to fight is given to those *on whom war is made*, because they are oppressed --- and

surely Allah is able to help them. Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. And surely Allah will help him who helps Him. Surely Allah is Strong, Mighty. (Quran 22:39-40).

In all the battles that ensued the Muslims were completely outnumbered by a well equipped formidable army. At the battle of Badr the Muslims could only muster a force of 313 old men and youth, with no military skill against a veteran Qurashite army of 1000 soldiers. With blood, sweat and tears, Muhammad (s) and his brave, devoted followers fought for the rights of humanity that Muhammad (s) stood for as explained by Jafar in his heart-rending address to the king of Abyssinia. And, yes, by the Grace of Almighty Allah, the Muslims, led by the Messenger of Allah, despite their military weakness, emerged victorious in all the battles that were forced upon them! This in itself is ample testimony of the truth of the mission of the Holy Prophet (s)

The Truce of Hudaibiyah

In the year 6 A.H⁵. the Holy Prophet (s) and 1,500 of his followers proceeded on an *umrah* (a mini, unofficial pilgrimage) to the Ka'bah in Makkah. On approaching the vicinity of the town they were confronted by a hostile Quraishite force prepared to offer armed resistance. The Muslims turned and settled at a place called Hudaibiyah, a day's journey from Makkah, in order to engage into negotiations with the Quraish to assure them that their intentions were not hostile but only to perform an *umrah* peacefully. Negotiations failed and Muslim emissaries sent to the Quraish to negotiate a peace treaty were arrested, molested and at least one is known to have been killed. The Quraish were bent upon fighting. It was a critical situation for the Muslims who were practically unarmed, unprepared and exposed. The Holy Prophet (s) called upon his companions to pledge themselves afresh in view of the inordinately critical nature of the situation, that they would fight to the last man in the defence of their faith. Under a certain tree close by his followers who accompanied him cheerfully took the pledge on his hand. This pledge is known as *Bai'at al Ridwān*, an act of dauntless self-sacrifice in laying the foundations of a new world order in which ultimate human rights free of

⁵ After Hejira, the date of the Prophet's exodus from Makkah

corruption, injustice and oppression are entrenched. The relentless passion of the Muslims to fight till the bitter end had a dampening effect on the spirits of the Quraish who yielded and opted for a diplomatic solution to the problem. A truce was drawn up restoring a state of peace between the two parties supposed to last for ten years. This peace treaty belies the false allegations that the Holy Prophet (s) was compelled to use force at all times.

Nay! He obeyed the Divine command:

And if they incline to peace, do thou incline to it and trust in Allah; He is the Hearing, the Knowing. And if they intend to deceive thee, then surely Allah is sufficient for thee - 8:61-62.

The fact that the conditions of the truce were humiliating to the Muslims, the Holy Prophet (s), nevertheless, in the interest of peace, pressed on regardless despite some opposition from his own camp. The basic conditions of the truce were:

1. The Muslims shall return to Madinah and not perform the pilgrimage that year.
2. They may return the following year, but shall not stay in Makkah for more than three days.
3. They shall not take with them any Muslims already residing in Makkah, nor shall they stand in the

way of any Muslim refugee who wishes to stay behind in Makkah.

4. Should any of the Makkans go over to Madinah the Muslims shall hand him over to the Makkans; but if any of the Madinite Muslims rejoin the Makkans, the latter shall not restore them to the Muslims.
5. The Arab tribes shall be free to enter into alliance with whichever party they choose.

The calm that the suspension of hostilities brought made it possible for the Muslims to preach their religion freely. Many, on hearing the beautiful message of Islam, became Muslims. Before the Truce the enemies of the Prophet (s) had been trying to create this dark, sinister, and grim picture of him as they do to this day. But when they saw the Holy Prophet close up without their tainted glasses of prejudice and bigotry they saw a noble soul who stood for human rights and peace in the land and not for terror as they had once imagined. They saw the great moral and spiritual transformation that he had brought about in his people. In effect, their hearts were conquered. How true the Holy Quran sketches the situation:

Repel evil with what is best, when lo! he between whom and you there is enmity will be like a warm friend (Quran 41:34).

Return to Makkah with Ten Thousand of Saints

The Holy Prophet did not conquer by way of aggressive warfare; he was conquering people's hearts and minds. At the time of his literal expulsion from Makkah, he was consoled by Almighty Allah:

He Who has made the Quran binding on thee *will surely bring thee back to the Place of Return* - 28:85

And surely they purposed to unsettle you from the land that they might expel you from it, and then *they will not remain (in power) after you but a little while* - 17:76

True enough, within a short seven to eight years he was brought back to the 'Place of Return' - (Makkah) and in the most dignified manner despite all odds!

When the Truce was signed, the number of Muslims that stood by the Prophet was only 1500. And yet it was only two years later, that the terms of the truce were violated when a tribe in alliance with the Quraish slaughtered many innocent Muslims. The Quraish refused to dissociate themselves with this ally of theirs and also refused to reinstate the terms of the Truce. It was then that the Holy Prophet (s) made preparations to march onward to Makkah, the city from which he had been exiled seven years earlier. The fact that this time, however, he

was accompanied by ten thousand saintly companions proved that the Truce was a success because within those two years of peace, something remarkable happened; thousands upon thousands voluntarily joined Islam. It was indeed the victory the Holy Quran prophesied at a time of utter despair:

Surely We have granted thee a clear victory. -48:1

When the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) re-entered Makkah after years of persecution along with his followers, it would most certainly have been justified to take firm action towards his persecutors, but did he? Did the Holy Prophet (s) return to Makkah with the mind-set of revenge or vengeance? No! He forgave them! The Holy Prophet provided a general amnesty stating, 'I say as my brother Joseph said':

No reproof be against you this day; Allah may forgive you, and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy. (Quran 12:92)

This was indeed the greatest humanitarian act of forgiveness ever witnessed in all of history, an act that would ultimately unite all of Arabia! Muhammad Ali in his biography of the Holy Prophet (s) entitled *Muhammad the Prophet* puts it nicely:

World history fails to produce the like of the Holy Prophet's generous forgiveness of such arch-enemies. No example of such magnanimous

forgiveness is found in the life of any other Prophet. Christ indeed preached forgiveness to enemies, but he had no occasion to exercise the quality of forgiveness for he never acquired the authority to deal with his persecutors (*Muhammad the Prophet* p. 132)

This long on-going struggle was well known throughout Arabia, and now that they had seen the remarkable triumph against all odds, tribe after tribe began to declare their allegiance to Islam; such tribes that had been in a constant feud with one another for countless years. And so truly the impossible became possible.

Thomas Lyell in his *The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia* p 99 writes:

A more disunited people it would be hard to find, till, suddenly, the miracle took place. A man arose who, by his personality and by his claim to direct Divine guidance, actually brought about the impossible, namely, the union of all these warring factions.

It was only two years after the peaceful conquest of Makkah that not 10,000, but 124,000 Muslims would witness the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage, a day to which he was destined to live, to have these words revealed to him by Almighty God:

This day have those who disbelieve despaired of your religion, so fear them not and fear Me. This day have I Perfected your religion for you, completed My favour to you, And have chosen for you Islam as a religion - Quran 5:3.

How appropriate the name Islam was chosen, a name that means 'entering into a state of Peace.' Islam incorporates the same basic universal principles as taught and preached by all the Prophets, and is not limited to one geographic location. Each of the Prophets had brought part of Islam with them. Islam ('entering into peace' and 'surrender' to the will of God) was now perfected and completed with the last of the Prophets, Muhammad (s)

The Holy Prophet Muhammad was annihilated in the love and worship of God, and was a living embodiment of the teachings of the Holy Quran, brought about an unparalleled transformation in Arabia. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam writes about this in his book, *Barakat-ud-dua* (The efficacy of prayer):

That remarkable event which took place in the desert land of Arabia by which millions of people who were spiritually dead were resuscitated in a very short time. And, people who had remained corrupted for generations became

imbued with Divine attributes and the blind regained their power of vision, and the dumb became eloquent in respect of the knowledge of God. A revolution took place in the world in such a sudden manner that the like of it no eye had seen before and no ear had heard – what was it after all? It was at the bottom **the silent prayers in the darkness of the night of a lonely man who had annihilated himself in God** that created this huge tumult in the world and produced those strange phenomena which seem almost impossible to have been affected by that unlettered, helpless man. (pp. 13–14)

Western writers too, with all their bias, have acknowledged the convincing effect the message and eloquence of the Quran had on transforming Arabia in less than a quarter-century.

Hartwig Hirschfeld, PhD, wrote in his publication of 1902, *New Researches Into The Composition And Exegesis Of The Qoran*:

Never has a people been led more rapidly to civilization, such as it was, than were the Arabs through Islam” (p. 5).

The Quran is unapproachable as regards *convincing* power,

eloquence, and even composition (p. 8).

We must not be surprised to find the Holy Quran regarded as the fountain-head of all the sciences. Every subject connected with heaven or earth, human life, commerce and various trades are occasionally touched upon, and this gave rise to the production of numerous monographs forming commentaries on parts of the holy book. In this way, the Quran was responsible for great discussions. And, to it was also indirectly due the marvellous development of all branches of science in the Moslim world (p. 9).

Thomas Patrick Hughes wrote in his publication of 1885, *A Dictionary of Islam: Being a cyclopaedia of the doctrines, rites, ceremonies, and customs, together with the technical and theological terms, of the Muhammadan religion*:

Here, therefore, its merits as a literary production should perhaps not be measured by some preconceived maxims of subjective and aesthetic taste, but by the effects which it produced in Muhammad's contemporaries and fellow countrymen. If it spoke so powerfully and *convincingly* to the hearts of his hearers as to weld

hitherto centrifugal and antagonistic elements into one compact and well-organised body, animated by ideas far beyond those which had until now ruled the Arabian mind, then its eloquence was perfect, **simply because it created a civilised nation out of savage tribes**, and shot a fresh woof into the old warp of history (p. 528; also see Kindle Edition, Locations 27795-27797).

Unfortunately, today certain sections of Muslims have regressed from the potential that could be achieved if they truly did abide by the teachings of the Holy Quran and the example of the Holy Prophet (s). As the Holy Quran says about real reform:

Surely Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change their own condition. (Quran 13:11),

And that condition is of the inner-self; the heart! There must be real reform from within before there can be reform from without.

Equal Justice for all

In the administration of justice, the Holy Prophet (s) was scrupulously even-handed. Muslim and non-Muslim, friend and foe, were alike in his eyes. Even before he received the Call, his impartiality, honesty and integrity were of household fame and people would bring their disputes to him to

settle. At Madinah idolaters and Jews both accepted him as arbitrator in all their disputes. Notwithstanding the deep-rooted malice of the Jews against Islam, when a case between a Jew and a Muslim once came up before the Holy Prophet (s) for hearing he decreed in favour of the Jew, regardless of the fact he and his followers might be alienated thereby. In fact throughout his entire life he was the embodiment of the Quranic injunction:

Let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance to duty – 5:8

We strongly condemn all acts of aggression and terror including all violations of basic human rights specifically those carried out in the name of Religion or State!

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