

Holy Prophet Muhammad was a mercy even to those who abused him

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 23 October 2020

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

“And We have not sent you (O Prophet) but as a mercy to the nations.” (21:107)

It is declared here that the Holy Prophet Muhammad was sent as “a mercy to the nations”, as nothing but “a mercy to the nations”. In this *khutba* I will discuss how he was a mercy to his opponents and critics also, not only to his followers. I will note here briefly that he was a mercy to the religions before him, especially the Jewish and Christian religions. This was in two main ways. Firstly, he verified the truth of their prophets, that they were in fact prophets and messengers of God, as he himself was a prophet and messenger. Secondly, the Bible related many stories with incidents in which these prophets were portrayed as having committed sins, some of these sins being serious transgressions of basic morality, whether morality as prescribed by religion or by any decent human standards. The Quran declared these prophets as being righteous, innocent and entirely without sin. So the Holy Prophet Muhammad was a mercy to the followers of the Bible by upholding the truth of their prophets and establishing their good character. But the followers of the Bible, in general, with some exceptions, returned this favour by making all kinds of allegations against the character of the Holy Prophet and attacking his sincerity and integrity, branding him as an imposter and a fraud, cruel and blood-thirsty, and a slave to his own desires.

He also proved to be a mercy to members of his own nation who persecuted him for many years and tortured and killed some of his followers. It is well known how, when he overcame them at the conquest of Makkah, he took no revenge but forgave them. Sir William Muir, a hostile critic of Islam of the 19th century, but a scholarly author who wrote a detailed biography of the Holy Prophet, writes in this book:

“The magnanimity with which Mohammad treated a people who had so long

hated and rejected him is worthy of all admiration. It was indeed for his own interest to forgive the past, and cast into oblivion its slights and injuries. But this did not the less require a large and generous heart.”

The Holy Quran had instructed the Holy Prophet to deal with those who verbally abused him as follows:

“You will certainly hear much abuse from the followers of previous books and from the idol-worshipping people. And if you are patient and keep your duty — this is surely a matter of great resolution.” — 3:186

The showing of patience, i.e., restraining yourself from doing anything, applies in the case of facing sheer abuse, in which there is no rational objection or criticism which can be answered. Any objections or criticism against Islam, based on some grounds, whether the grounds be strong or weak, must be answered by a Muslim, and answered by means of word, not violence. The guidance for dealing with that situation is as follows:

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner.” (16:125)

But where there is sheer mockery, sarcastic remarks and gratuitous abuse, the Quran requires Muslims to exercise patience, as stated in the first verse above.

The Quran also told the Holy Prophet repeatedly: “Bear patiently what they say.” These very words are repeated in 20:130, 50:39 and 73:10. In the last instance the Quran says:

وَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَاهْجُرْهُمْ هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا ﴿١٠٠﴾

“And bear patiently what they say and forsake them with a becoming withdrawal.”

Instead of entangling yourself with such people, you should bear with patience

their hurtful comments and withdraw from them in a dignified, well-mannered way, not by descending to their level of misbehaviour and abuse. As we can see, a Muslim is required to show good manners whether arguing with others about his religion or breaking off from them because they are not putting forward any point to be answered but are resorting to mockery and ridicule to cause annoyance, irritation and offence.

The Quran goes further and says: “When you hear Allah’s messages disbelieved in and mocked at, do not sit with them *until they enter into some other discourse*” (4:140) and: “And when you see those who talk nonsense about Our messages, withdraw from them *until they enter into some other discourse*” (6:68). The Arabic words for “*until they enter into some other discourse*” are: **حَتَّىٰ يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ**. These words mean that after withdrawing from such people, you can re-join them in some other conversation. You may have other things to talk about with them or perhaps some mutual interests which you can discuss.

The life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad shows that he never punished those who abused him verbally; he also stopped his followers from punishing such people. In fact, he did good to them. One such case is that of a man called Suhayl ibn Amr. He held a prominent position among the opponents of the Prophet Muhammad in the Quraish tribe at Makkah. He was their spokesman and a skilled orator. He used to employ his talent of oratory in making speeches against the Holy Prophet. He joined the battle of Badr against the Muslims and when Muslims won that battle he was among the prisoners taken by them. He was brought before the Holy Prophet. Hazrat Umar ibn al-Khattab suggested that the following punishment should be applied to him before releasing him:

“O Prophet of God, let me pull out Suhayl’s front teeth so that he would never be able to exercise his oratory against you.”

The Holy Prophet replied without hesitation: “Certainly not. I will not mutilate anyone, for God would mutilate me even though I am His Prophet.”

The Holy Prophet also made this prediction about Suhayl: “Perhaps one day he will say something which will make you happy.”

Suhayl went back to Makkah and continued to be an enemy of the Muslims. Four years after this incident, when the Holy Prophet concluded the famous peace treaty of Hudaibiyah with the Quraish, Suhayl ibn Amr was the negotiator on behalf of the Quraish. When the treaty was being written, the Holy Prophet dictated to Hazrat Ali to start writing it as follows: “*Bismillah-ir Rahman-ir Rahim*”. Suhayl objected to the use of this Muslim expression, and insisted that it be changed to just *Bismillahumma*, as the Quraish did not apply the names *Rahman* (Beneficent) and *Rahim* (Merciful) to Allah’s name. Accepting this change, the Holy Prophet then continued his dictation: “This is an agreement between Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, and the Quraish.” Suhayl again objected saying: “If we call you the Messenger of Allah, why are we fighting you? Just write your name and the name of your father.” The Holy Prophet agreed to make that change also.

One condition in this treaty was that if someone at Makkah became a Muslim and escaped to find shelter with Muslims at Madinah, Muslims must hand him back. Suhayl insisted on including this condition. On the other hand, if a Muslim at Madinah left Islam and went to join their opponents at Makkah, the Quraish would not have to return him to the Muslims. It so happened that, just as this agreement was settled, Suhayl’s own son, Abu Jandal from Makkah, who had become a Muslim, reached that very spot and sought refuge with the Muslims. He showed the Muslims the scars of his tortures at the hands of the Quraish. But Suhayl said that the agreement was now concluded, no exception could be made, and his son must be sent back to Makkah. He slapped his son and pulled him by his hair to return to the Quraish.

Two years after this, the Holy Prophet, at the head of a Muslim army, conquered Makkah. They were unopposed generally by the people of Makkah, but some were ready to fight against the Muslims. Among those was Suhayl ibn Amr. But they too had to give up. Suhayl was now deeply moved by the Holy Prophet’s compassionate treatment of his enemies and he embraced Islam. So you can see how, even after the

Holy Prophet saved Suhayl from having his teeth knocked out for opposing Islam, Suhayl continued in his opposition to Islam for years, till at last he became a Muslim.

Two years later the Holy Prophet died in Madinah. As we all well know, Muslims were at once plunged into anxiety, confusion and uncertainty about the future. Again, it is well known that at Madinah Hazrat Abu Bakr made a speech that restored the composure of the Muslims and made them think rationally, that despite the Holy Prophet's death Islam still lives on. It is less known that Muslims in Makkah also, many of them only recent converts, were greatly perturbed and shaken by his death. Here it fell to Suhayl to make a similar speech that reinforced the faith and confidence of the Muslims of that city. With his power of oratory, he addressed them thus: "The Prophet's death shall increase the power of Islam and strengthen it. ... O People of Makkah! You were the last to enter Islam. Be not the first to desert it. Have faith that God will bring you final victory just as the Prophet of God has promised you" (*The Life of Muhammad*, by Muhammad Husein Haykal, 1983 edition, p. 513–514). This is the man who opposed Islam even up to the conquest of Makkah. Thus was fulfilled the Holy Prophet's prophecy that the man who was making speeches attacking Islam would one day make a speech that would bring Muslims great joy.

The Holy Prophet saved Suhayl's teeth from being knocked out, and saved him from being rendered disabled to make speeches *against* Islam. Nonetheless Suhayl continued his opposition and campaign against Islam, but in the end it was by his speech that the Muslim converts of Makkah remained steadfast and loyal to Islam.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَاوَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ،

إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ۔