

The Holy Prophet (saw): A Messenger of Peace and Reconciliation
By Tommy Kallon, Sadr Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya UK

Most Worthy Chairman, Respected Elders, Dear Sisters and Brothers!

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuhu.

I stand before you humbled by the enormous honour of addressing this august assembly, grateful for the privilege, mindful of the task at hand.

The Holy Prophet of Islam (saw) – the perfect exemplar, the prince of peace, the pride of the universe – whose life was immaculate and whose character unimpeachable, came into the world as a mercy for all mankind. Yet, for centuries, the opponents of Islam have consistently ignored all that was patently good, noble and beneficent in his life, example and teachings and have attempted to portray him, God forbid, as blood-thirsty and violent. Crude and offensive caricatures and cartoons have been produced in books and newspapers to demonstrate their malice and brazen attitude towards the Holy Prophet (saw).

Our Beloved Prophet (saw) has also been greatly misrepresented by some of his own followers, both in medieval and present times, who have committed enormities and monstrous crimes in his fair name.

It is my task today, within the short time at my disposal, to establish that the Holy Prophet (saw) was indeed a Messenger of Peace and Reconciliation.

Islam a Religion of Peace

It is a great distinction of the Holy Prophet (saw) that the very religion he founded bears a name the literal meaning of which is “peace”. The word “Islam” indicates the very essence of the religious system known by that name. The teachings of the Holy Prophet (saw) guarantee and establish peace at all levels and in all spheres: individual, social, economic, national and international.

One who becomes a Muslim not only enters a safe haven but also guarantees it for others. The Holy Prophet (saw) defined a Muslim as one whose word or deed cause no harm to others. ‘Peace’ is the greeting of Muslims and ‘Peace’ shall also be the greeting of the dwellers of Paradise.

Inter-Religious Peace

That the great religions of the world are many in form yet one in origin is a truth now widely recognised and accepted but before the advent of the Holy Prophet (saw) that truth was quite unknown. It was from the desert of Arabia and from the mouth the unlettered Prophet (saw) that the great truth was promulgated that our God is the Lord, not of any particular tribe or nation, but of all peoples and all nations and that there is no people who have not been blessed with Divine guidance through prophethood.

God has been equally merciful and beneficent to all nations. If He raised the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) from Arabia, then He also raised Moses from Egypt, Jesus from Judea, Buddha and Krishna from India, Confucius from China and Zoroaster from Iran, peace be upon them all. Though their teachings were limited in their scope and have subsequently been interpolated, these prophets were the propagators of the same fundamental truths about the Unity of God. Islam is the only religion which accepts the founders of all revealed religions as Messengers of God and makes it incumbent upon its followers to believe in all of them. Comb through the pages of all religious scriptures and you will not find a similar teaching in them. A Christian may look upon Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) as an impostor, a Jew may regard Jesus (as) as a false Prophet, a Hindu may consider Moses (as) a charlatan, but a Muslim leaves the pale of Islam the moment he fails to accept all of them as Prophets of God. This is the most practical step Islam has taken towards creating an atmosphere of peace and goodwill among the followers of various faiths. Since the creation of man, no prophet other than the Holy Prophet of Islam (saw) has brought such a teaching.

Respecting religious sentiments is another invaluable lesson taught to us by the Holy Prophet (saw). Once, during his lifetime, a Muslim and a Jew were involved in an argument. Both claimed and counter-claimed the relative superiority of their respective prophets. It appears the Muslim contender may have made his claim in a manner which wounded the susceptibilities of the Jew as he approached the Holy Prophet (saw) and lodged a complaint against the Muslim. Upon hearing the complaint, the Holy Prophet (saw) admonished against being unmindful of the sentiments of others. 'Do not exalt me above Moses', he said. This is despite the fact the Holy Qur'an declares him superior to all prophets. Such were the high standards of decency and courtesy the Holy Prophet (saw) required of his followers even in the throes of a heated theological debate.

The Charter of Freedom which he granted to St. Catherine's Monastery in Mount Sinai in 628, the 6th year of Hegira, is, perhaps, the best illustration the Holy Prophet's desire for inter-religious peace. This monumental document is unprecedented in the history of mankind. It states:

"This is the document which Muhammad, the son of Abdullah, God's Prophet, Warner and Bearer of glad tidings has caused to be written so that there should remain no excuse for those coming after. I have caused this document to be written for the Christians of the East and West, for those who live near, and for those of the distant lands, for the Christians living at present and for those who will come after, for those Christians who are known to us and for those as well whom we do not know.

Any Muslim violating or distorting what has been ordained will be considered to be violating God's Covenant and will be transgressing against His Promise and by doing so, will incur God's wrath, be he a monarch or an ordinary subject. I promise that any monk or wayfarer who will seek my help on the mountains, in forests, deserts or habitations, or places of worship, I will repel his enemies with

my friends and helpers, with all my relatives and with all those who profess to follow me and will defend them, because they are my covenant. And I will defend the covenanted against the persecution, injury and embarrassment of their enemies in lieu of the poll tax they have promised to pay. If they prefer to defend their properties and persons themselves, they will be allowed to do so and will not be put to any inconvenience on that account.

No bishop will be expelled from his bishopric, no monk from his monastery, no priest from his place of worship, and no pilgrim will be detained in his pilgrimage. None of their churches or other places of worship will be desolated or destroyed or demolished. No material of their churches will be used to build mosques or houses for the Muslims; any Muslim doing so will be regarded as recalcitrant to God and His Prophet. Monks and Bishops will be subject to no poll tax or indemnity whether they live in forests or on rivers, in the East or in the West, in the North or in the South. I give them my word of honour. They are on my promise and covenant and will enjoy perfect immunity from all sorts of inconveniences. Every help shall be given to them in the repair of their churches. They shall be absolved of wearing arms. They shall be protected by the Muslims. Let this document not be disobeyed till Judgement Day.”

(Signed: Muhammad, the Messenger of God. ([Letters of the Messenger])

This important historical document affirms the Holy Prophet’s (saw) sincerity and leaves no room for doubting his disposition to peace.

Social Peace

In the establishment of social peace also, the example of the Holy Prophet (saw) stands aloft as a beacon to illuminate the path to lasting harmony. His teachings provide conditions of peace for all those who heed his admonitions – neighbours and wayfarers, rich and poor, young and old, men and women.

Before the advent of the Holy Prophet (saw), women in Arabia were deprived of their rights and distributed as inheritance. By recognising the social status of women and their rightful place in society as wives and mothers; by securing their rights in inheritance, in divorce, in the guardianship of children, in the management of the affairs of the family and in worship; the Holy Prophet (saw) established peace in the family on a firm basis.

The momentous address which the Holy Prophet (saw) delivered shortly before his demise, after the performance of what has come to be known the Farewell Pilgrimage, is an epitome of the entire spirit and teaching of Islam. In the course of this address, he had this to say:

“O men, what I say to you, you must hear and remember. All Muslims are as brethren to one another. All of you are equal. All men, whatever nation or tribe they may belong to, and whatever station in life they may hold are equal. Even as the fingers of the two hands are equal, so are human beings equal to one another. No one has any right, any superiority to claim over another. You are as brothers.

O men, your God is One and your ancestor is one. An Arab possesses no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab over an Arab. A white man is in no way superior to a black nor for that matter is a black man better than a white, but only to the extent to which he discharges his duty to God and man. The most honoured among you in the sight of God is the most righteous among you...

Even as this month is sacred, this land inviolate, and this day holy, so has God made the lives, property and honour of every man sacred. To take any man's life or his property, or attack his honour, is as unjust and wrong as to violate the sacredness of this day, this month, and this territory. What I command you today is not meant only for today. It is meant for all time. You are expected to remember it and to act upon it until you leave this world and go to the next to meet your Maker...

What I have said to you, you should communicate to the ends of the earth. Perchance those who have not heard me may benefit by it more than those who have heard."

This sermon is an eternal Charter of Peace for all mankind. It shows how deep was the Holy Prophet's concern for the welfare of man and the peace of the world.

Economic Peace

"Peace depends on justice and economic progress depends on peace." In one of his recent addresses, this is the most pertinent advice offered to the world by Hadhrat Ameerul Mumineen (atba). Economic justice is a beautiful slogan common both to capitalism and socialism. Unfortunately, however, both have failed to do full justice to this golden principle as economic exploitation and unfair practices continue to widen the gap between the rich and the poor.

In the domain of economic peace, the teachings of the Holy Prophet (saw) are also an invaluable source of guidance for us. He took steps to remove vast disparities of wealth and poverty, necessary for the establishment of economic peace.

He enjoined the distribution of inheritance among all heirs – parents, children, widows, brother and sisters – so that no one has the power to bequeath the whole of his property to one person and thereby promote the accumulation of wealth.

He also recognised, in principle, the right of the poor in the wealth of the rich and through the institution of Zakat, he provided for the discharge of all those rights that the poor have in the wealth of the rich, and thus bring about reconciliation between the haves and the have-nots.

The concept of interest has played havoc with the economic peace of many households, institutions and even governments. In his historic address at the United Kingdom Houses of Parliament, Hadhrat Ameerul Mumineen (atba) made the following comment:

“A major issue today is the economic crisis of what has been termed the credit crunch. Strange as it may sound, the evidence points towards one fact. The Holy Qur’an guided us by saying avoid interest because interest is such a curse that it is a danger for domestic, national and international peace.” (22nd October 2008)

The prohibition of interest is central to the economic philosophy of Islam. Allah loves beneficence towards the poor and the needy and the equitable distribution of wealth among people. The system of interest strikes at the heart of these blessings.

A study conducted by leading scholars in which they sought alternatives to the interest-based global economy concluded that “by applying the Islamic approach, a lot of human misery could have been avoided.” (*A Short Review of the Historical Critique of Usury*, Wayne A.M. Visser and Alastair McIntosh) This shows that the Holy Prophet (saw) had laid the foundations for economic peace.

National Peace

Strained relationship between rulers and the ruled is another factor that can disturb peace. Islam prefers a democratic government but does not preclude any form of government. Failure of governments and political systems, however, can cause misery and disaffection and can ultimately lead to demonstrations, industrial strife, rebellion and disorder.

The teachings of the Holy Prophet (saw) are indispensable for the establishment of national peace. He taught that authority vested in rulers is not their private property but a national trust that must be discharged with absolute justice and that government should be carried out in consultation with the people. On the other hand, he admonished the people to realise that the power to choose their rulers was a gift from God and therefore it should be carefully invested in those who fully deserve it. The Holy Qur’an says:

Verily, Allah commands you to make over the trusts to those entitled to them, and that, when you judge between men, you judge with justice. And surely excellent is that with which Allah admonishes you! Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.
(Ch.4:V.59)

After vesting authority in deserving rulers, the Holy Prophet (saw) taught that they must be accorded the fullest co-operation and obedience and not to rebel against them. The next verse goes on to say:

O ye who believe! obey Allah, and obey His Messenger and those who are in authority among you...
(Ch.4:V.60)

Obedience cuts at the root of all kinds of rebellion and anarchy and by laying absolute emphasis on this the Holy Prophet (saw) laid the foundation for national peace.

International Peace

For the settlement of international disputes, the following verse of the Holy Qur'an is pertinent:

And if two parties of believers fight against each other, make peace between them; then if after that one of them transgresses against the other, fight the party that transgresses until it returns to the command of Allah. Then if it returns, make peace between them with equity, and act justly. Verily, Allah loves the just. (Ch.49:V.10)

This verse serves as an excellent model for the whole world and especially the United Nations. Islam forbids aggression but urges us to fight if failure to fight jeopardises peace and promotes war. This is the teaching on which peace can ultimately be built and this is the teaching on which the Holy Prophet (saw) based his practice.

Jihad

My dear sisters and brothers! It is an oft-repeated allegation that Islam was spread by the sword. Such allegations, born out of prejudice and envy, have formed the basis of later claims that Islam is a religion of war and terror. Fair-minded commentators have utterly rejected this false notion of Islam. De L O'Leary, for example, writes:

“History makes it clear, however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most absurd myths that historians have ever repeated.” (Islam at the Crossroads, p.8)

About this the Promised Messiah (as) writes:

“Some, in their ignorance, blame Islam of Jihad to spread its message and of gaining converts at the point of sword. They claim that these converts were forced to change their religion under the threat of the sword. Woe to them a thousand times! They have exceeded all limits in their injustice and in their efforts to conceal the truth. O pity! What is wrong with them, that they wilfully turn away from realities? Our Holy Prophet (saw) did not appear in the land of Arabia in the capacity of a monarch. It therefore cannot be suspected that he had royal majesty and power with him, such that the people gathered under his banner for fear of their lives.” (A Message of Peace, p.37)

The facts speak eloquently for themselves. For thirteen long years in Makkah after receiving the Call, the Holy Prophet (saw) suffered persecution and privations that were bitter, cruel and sustained. His tiny band of followers also suffered savage cruelties. They bore all these with dignity and decorum, setting the highest example of steadfastness. Never did they offer violence against violence, preferring to migrate from their homeland 200 miles into Madinah

instead. Even then they would not be left in peace. The enemy pursued them with the ostensible aim of wiping out Islam by use of force. It was then and only then that the Holy Prophet (saw) was compelled to take up the sword in defence of truth and freedom of conscience. Failure to fight would have meant the extermination of free belief and the search for truth.

Yet even during conflict, the Holy Prophet (saw) carefully particularised a number of rules of war for his followers intended to ensure that no transgression occurred. They were forbidden from attacking women, children, the elderly and the infirm. They were not to strike terror into the general population and were always to keep in view the possibility of peace. Likewise, they were to be mindful of protecting public buildings, fruit trees, cattle and religious seminaries.

Respected Chairman, dear sisters and brothers! The struggle against the enemies of Islam which appeared utterly hopeless in the beginning was carried to a triumphant consummation when Makkah, without any bloodshed, opened its gates to the Holy Prophet (saw) and his companions on the day it was conquered. This conquest of Makkah, this glorious day in the history of Islam, this singular event in the history of mankind affirms more than anything else that our Beloved Prophet (saw) was the true Champion of Peace. Victory did not spoil him. Triumph did not detract from his excellent virtues. Power did not corrupt him. The world witnessed the spectacle of the most magnanimous and generous act of forgiveness of which history furnishes a record. The Holy Prophet (saw) readily granted amnesty to his erstwhile persecutors, the magnanimity of which softened the hardest of hearts. Bitter enemies of the morning became warm friends by midday. Even the most die-hard enemies of Islam could not resist the healing balm so generously and so effectively applied by the Holy Prophet (saw).

Commenting on this conquest of Makkah, the Rev. Bosworth Smith writes:

“Now would have been the moment to gratify his ambition, to satiate his lust, to glut his revenge. Read the account of the entry of Muhammad into Mecca side by side with that of Marins or Sulla into Rome. Compare all the attendant circumstances, the outrages that preceded, and the use made by each of his recovered power and we shall then be in a better position to appreciate the magnanimity and moderation of the Prophet of Arabia. There were no proscription lists, no plunder, no wanton revenge. From a helpless orphan to the ruler of a big country was a great transition, yet the Prophet retained the nobility of his character under all circumstances.” (*Muhammad and Muhammadanism*)

Peace between Man and God

My dear sisters and brothers! Let there remain no doubt that the Holy Prophet (saw) was indeed a Messenger of peace and reconciliation whose greatest achievement in this regard was the establishment of peace between man and God. He was born in an era which was the darkest period of the Dark Ages. Religion, morals and philosophy were all at a low ebb. The

Arabs were divided into warring factions; he united them in love for each other and for their Creator. They were responding like beasts to their animal urges; he refined their cravings into aspirations for the sublime. They were idolatrous and lacking in any notion of Divine Unity; he established them as the sincerest worshippers of the One True God. Even then he would continually pray for the salvation of his spiritual progeny. Sinless though he was, he prayed for the forgiveness of our sins. To save us from the fire of Hell, he would stand so long in prayer that his feet would get swollen. He wept for our sake till his breast heaved like a boiling pot and his prayer mat became soaked in tears. He drew unto us the mercy of God; he toiled for His pleasure, again for our sake. He caused us to be wrapped up in the mantle of Allah's grace and the garment of His compassion. In short, he paved the way for us to achieve everlasting peace, communion and union with our Maker.

Conclusion

Respected Chairman, dear sisters and brothers! Nothing seems more ironical than that the Prophet who was born in Makkah, known as *Balad-ul-Ameen*, that is, the Abode of Peace; the Prophet who founded a religion the very name of which means peace; the Prophet who struck at the very root of religious acrimony by requiring his followers to believe in all Prophets of God; the Prophet whose teachings if fully acted upon would bring about an era of perpetual peace in all spheres of life; the Prophet who lit up the path to everlasting peace, communion and union with our God; should be branded the prophet of war whose religion was propagated at the point of the sword.

We will content ourselves, however, in the knowledge that every objective study of the life of our Beloved Prophet (saw) cannot but affirm his excellent virtues and peaceful disposition. The Christian author, Karen Armstrong, when suggesting how the West could understand Islam, writes:

“Perhaps one place to start is with the figure of Muhammad: a complex, passionate man who sometimes did things that are difficult for us to accept, but who had genius of a profound order and founded a religion and a cultural tradition that was not based on the sword - despite the Western myth - and whose name ‘Islam’ signifies ‘peace and reconciliation.’” (Muhammad, A Western Attempt To Understand Islam, pp. 265/266)

The great British playwright and author, George Bernard Shaw, concluded:

“...far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the Savior of Humanity. I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it much needed peace and happiness” (“The Genuine Islam, Vol. 1, No. 8, 1936)

Responsibility of Ahmadis

Respected Chairman! I would be remiss in my duty here today if, in the end, I fail to highlight our responsibility as Ahmadi Muslims in this regard. We live in a world rent

asunder by strife; where warfare and conflict are commonplace; where economies have faltered under the weight of inequality and political systems have ruptured by the force of their corruption; where the most basic of rights purported to be for the many are usurped by the few; where world leaders are finding themselves increasingly powerless in offering lasting solutions to global problems. For every level of human existence be it individual, communal, national or international, it is acutely obvious that our modern world is devoid of peace and harmony.

It is a sad indictment of the current state of affairs made only worse when we consider that over 1400 years ago in the barren deserts of Arabia, at a time when populations were sparse, when modes of communication were limited and methods of warfare basic, that Almighty Allah imbued the most humble of His Servants to have ever trod the earth with the most exquisite message of peace that humankind has ever been privy to and shaped that Messenger's life in such a way that every last sinew of his being was dedicated to guiding mankind as to the true manner in which that message could be inculcated into our daily lives.

As followers of the Promised Messiah (as) who was commissioned by Allah to renew the relationship between man and God, to eliminate religious wars and to lay the foundations of peace, it is our responsibility in today's world to explain all the beautiful teachings of peace and reconciliation illustrated in the life of the Holy Prophet (saw). We, the members of this Community, must confront the dark forces of ignorance and prejudice surrounding the citadels of civilisations with the true teachings of the Holy Prophet (saw) so that humankind can benefit alike from his precept and from his example.

It is only fitting, therefore, that I leave the last word to our Beloved Huzur who once addressed the Community in the course of a Friday Sermon in the following terms:

“It is a duty of every Ahmadi today that he should take this message to the whole world that the true teaching of Islam is the one that has been given to us by the Promised Messiah (as). You should take the message of love, peace and brotherhood and declare to the whole world that Islam was not spread by the sword but by the excellence of its teachings... It is the crying need of the time to convince the world that Islam spread during the time of the Holy Prophet (saw) because of his prayers and supplications and in this age, God willing, this will happen only by presenting the true teachings of Islam as expounded by the Promised Messiah (as), the true devotee and servant of the Holy Prophet of Islam (saw).”

May Allah so ordain that we are able to respond to this call of Hadhrat Ameerul Mumineen and thereby become instrumental in establishing the peace in the world which our Beloved Prophet (saw) pined for so much. Ameen.

Chairman, Sisters, Brothers! Thanks for having me. Wassalamu Alaikum.