

BismillahirRahmanirRahim

The Benevolence of the Holy Prophet

Begin with recitation of: "And We have sent thee not but as a mercy for all peoples."
Holy Quran [21:108]

Benevolence is not a word used very much in the English language anymore. When I was given the topic of this speech - "The Benevolence of the Holy Prophet Muhammad SA" - I had to first turn to the dictionary to make sure that I was very clear on the word's meaning. One dictionary's definition of the word benevolent interestingly stated: "that which serves a charitable rather than a profit-making purpose". Other references simply defined benevolence as kindness, tender-heartedness or associated the word with the concepts of compassion, generosity and forgiveness. All of these are wonderfully fitting when speaking of the Holy Prophet of Islam SA.

The Latin root meaning of the word, though, I think is the most elegant definition. The two roots of the word are '*bene*', which means 'well' and '*velle*' which means 'to wish'. So the real root meaning of the word means to be "well-wishing of others". By definition, this is the exact demeanor of the Holy Prophet Muhammad SA: He was a well-wisher for all of humanity. In the Holy Quran, Allah The Most High addresses this characteristic of the benevolence of the Holy Prophet SA which reached great heights.

We have all heard this famous verse from the Quran that I opened my speech with, which describes the Prophet Muhammad SA "...as a mercy for all peoples."

This is a very profound statement, but the deeper question is, what does this really mean? *How* is the Prophet a mercy for all people?

Allah answers this question directly in the Holy Quran, [33:22]. He states: "Verily you have in the Prophet of Allah an excellent model, for him who fears Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah much."

The Prophet Muhammad PBUH, besides being a law-bearing prophet and spending his every moment in service to Allah and humanity at large, served as the perfect human being with the perfect divine nature that Allah has called us to emulate. His very example is a mercy for all of humankind to study, reflect upon and imitate. Humankind has been given no greater gift from Almighty Allah, the Most Merciful than this example of a perfect human being. Allah even refers to the Prophet SA in the Holy Quran as "Ya Sin" or "O Perfect Man!".

Allah goes on in the Holy Quran to describe the nature of this exalted prophet:

[9:128] “Surely, a Messenger has come unto you from among yourselves; grievous to him is that you should fall into trouble; he is ardently desirous of your welfare; and to the believers he is compassionate, merciful.”

So in this perfectly descriptive revealed verse about the nature of the Holy Prophet SA, Allah describes him as “ardently desirous of your welfare”, “compassionate” and “merciful”. It is even stated here that Muhammad SA was greatly grieved and pained by seeing others falling into trouble. The Prophet SA was extremely tender-hearted and empathetic - feeling and sharing humankind’s predicaments and praying and working fervently for their spiritual betterment. He wanted the very best for people. He suffered when they suffered.

Even outsiders to Islam, recognized the extraordinarily benevolent nature of our Holy Prophet SA ...

A Western writer, W.C. Taylor, said this about the Holy Prophet in his book ‘The History of Muhammadanism (and its Sects)’:

“So great was his liberality to the poor that he often left his household unprovided, nor did he content himself with relieving their wants, he entered into conversation with them, and expressed a warm sympathy for their sufferings. He was a firm friend and a faithful ally.”

Another writer, Dr. Gustav Weil, in his ‘History of the Islamic Peoples’ wrote these words about our Chief:

“Muhammad was a shining example to his people. His character was pure and stainless. His house, his dress, his food - they were characterized by a rare simplicity. So unpretentious was he that he would receive from his companions no special mark of reverence, nor would he accept any service from his slave (servant) which he could do for himself. **He was accessible to all and at all times. He visited the sick and was full of sympathy for all. Unlimited was his benevolence and generosity as also was his anxious care for the welfare of the community.**”

Even regarding those who disbelieved in the message of Islam and even with those who directly disrespected the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet had a soft heart for them as well and used to spend countless hours in prayer literally weeping for those unfortunate, ignorant souls. We are reminded of the people in Mecca who would throw garbage on the Prophet’s SA doorstep and even on his person on a daily basis. Like clockwork, everyday, people would pile up garbage on his doorstep - and this wasn’t like the garbage of today of plastic containers and paper - they threw animal entrails and excrement and blood and thorns and rotten food all upon his threshold. It is recorded that once while he was in sadja - that is, prostration - praying, some Meccans dumped the entrails of a camel on his back and head. Other times they threw goat droppings on

his back while in prayer. So great was their hatred that another time they attacked him and strangled him until Abu Bakr came to break it up, at which time Abu Bakr himself was beaten so severely that one could not even recognize his face. We also know of the incident at Taif - where mere children were instigated to throw stones at him to such a degree that blood ran down his legs and saturated his very sandals. Despite such disgusting and degenerate behaviour, the Prophet SA never once retaliated nor abused back. He only continued to pray for their reform. In the case of the stoning at Taif, Allah ta ala, we know, sent an angel to inform the Prophet of the impending destruction of the people of the city only waiting upon the Holy Prophet's very say so, to which the Prophet Muhammad SA only prayed that Allah let their generations be saved and become Muslims.

This benevolent demeanor of the Prophet SA reached such a point that Allah Ta Ala openly addressed the Prophet's inner turmoil in the Quran. It was said to the Prophet SA:

"Haply thou wilt grieve thyself to death because they believe not." [26:4]

Allah was acknowledging the Prophet's SA anguish. It grieved the Holy Prophet's SA heart deeply that people did not accept the message of Islam, which called people towards Allah's forgiveness and love and sought to heal and reform their hearts. As with anyone who has drunk deeply of the love and mercy of Allah, it distressed his heart to see the disbelieving people continue on in their ignorant and sinful ways, earning themselves more pain and misery and eventual punishment.

The Promised Messiah Mirza Ghulam Ahmad AS comments on this verse in his writings: "His life as a Prophet was divided into 2 parts - one spent in Mecca which extended over 13 years and the other spent in Medina extending over 10 years. His Meccan life illustrated his name Ahmad. During that period, his time was spent weeping before Allah, in seeking His help and in supplication. He who is fully informed of his Meccan life knows that no lover could ever equal the tears the Holy Prophet SA shed and the supplications he made during that period in search of His Beloved, nor can any lover ever do so in the future. His weeping was not for himself but was on account of his awareness of the condition of the world. The worship of God had disappeared and God Almighty, having put faith in his soul, had inspired him with a joy and delight. He naturally desired to communicate this delight and love to the world, but when he observed the condition of the world and the capacities and the natures of the people, he was confronted with great difficulties. He wept over this condition of the world so much that he put his life in danger." (Essence of Islam, Vol. 1 - a passage from Ruhani Khazain)

Another of the most compelling and most telling descriptions of the Prophet's benevolence, though, is this statement of Allah regarding the Holy Prophet SA in the Holy Quran: [3:160] "And it is by the great mercy of Allah that thou art kind towards

them, and if thou hadst been rough and hard-hearted, they would surely have dispersed from around thee. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them, and consult them in matters of administration; and when thou art determined, then put thy trust in Allah. Surely, Allah loves those who put their trust in Him."

This Quranic statement is so unique in the recorded scriptures of all faiths that it is without parallel. No other description and instruction is given to a prophet that comes near to matching its precision and magnitude. First, Allah recognizes the great kindness and mercy of the Prophet SA - the very loving and soft demeanor that made him renowned and respected even before he was a prophet. The Prophet SA was soft with people - something that attracts and moves other people's hearts. This example was testified to by Anas bin Malik, who served the Prophet Muhammad SA for ten years. He said that Rasoolullah SA never once rebuked him. "When I did something, he never questioned my manner of doing it; and when I did not do something, he never questioned my failure to do it. He was the most good-natured of all men." Such testimony from someone who spent every moment of every day with him for a decade is extraordinary.

This verse rightly also points out the fact that if the Holy Prophet SA would have been "rough and hard-hearted", the people would have fled from him. This is not only a Divine testimony to the Prophet's nature and demeanor, but it also serves as a potent argument to detractors and enemies of Islam who currently sling filth and lies at the historical image of the Prophet SA. They paint him as some kind of blood thirsty tyrant who was cruel and bent on punishment and war. Besides all the evidence and history to the contrary of this ridiculous portrayal, they miss the common sense of this Quranic revelation: If the Prophet SA would have been anything like this distortion of theirs, people would have fled from him, not followed him and devoted their lives to him and reformed themselves into a great and enlightened civilization that lasted for centuries and spread far and wide. We see the results everyday of the "rough and hard-hearted" mullahs that currently plague much of the Islamic world today - they do not attract people, they repulse people from Islam. The only followers they have are thugs and fanatics who are rough and hard-hearted themselves.

This mentioned verse goes on and instructs the Prophet PBUH to continue to pardon the people for their shortcomings and beg forgiveness of them - that is, to continue his deep benevolence and care towards them - and in even greater addition to that, to "consult them in matters of administration". And we know that the Prophet SA indeed did do this. He consulted the people in matters of administration and governance, as well as in their personal affairs, so that their needs and desires were acknowledged and met.

It was the Prophet SA himself who said, "**You will not be a believer until you love for your brother what you love for yourself**" (Sahih Al-Bukhari). So benevolence, love and well-wishing is the very essence of belief in the faith of Islam. This, of course, is the

Golden Rule - Truly want for others what you want for yourself. But far beyond just teaching this high ideal, the Holy Prophet SA gave us unparalleled, practical teachings and examples in which to fulfill these standards. He lived this teaching and it has been recorded for all to see.

Towards children, the Holy Prophet SA had great benevolence. In the time of his coming, it was a brutal custom of the Arabs to commit infanticide against baby girls out of some kind of twisted shame or a fear of poverty. The Prophet SA forbade this barbaric practice. It might seem unbelievable to us now that people could actually bury their own children alive, but it should be known that this behavior still goes on in the world today - namely, in both China and in India. Beyond banning infanticide, the Prophet SA instructed parents to "Respect your children and cultivate in them the best of manners." He also was reported to have said, "No gift, among all the gifts of a father to his child, is better than education."

The Prophet SA also taught fairness in raising children. Once when a father came to the Prophet to witness a gift he was giving to his son, the Prophet SA asked him about his other sons and whether or not he was giving to his other sons a similar gift. When the man replied that he was not, the Prophet SA responded, "I cannot be witness to an unjust act."

The Holy Prophet PBUH once picked up his grandchildren and kissed them and held them affectionately. Upon seeing this, a Bedouin who was present stated, 'O Messenger of Allah, we have never shown affection to our children like you have shown.' The Holy Prophet SA responded that it was unfortunate that the man was deprived of such love and mercy in his heart. The Prophet SA was known to be very kind to children and greet them and rub their heads and pick them up when he saw them and pray for them - the children, in turn, loved him and would flock to him whenever they saw him. The Prophet SA said, "One who has no compassion for our young ones and who does not recognize the rights of our elders is not of us."

The Prophet SA himself having been an orphan, paid special heed in caring for orphaned children. He said, "I and the one who looks after the needs of the orphan and brings him or her up in the best possible manner, will be together in Paradise like two fingers of one hand". He also said, "The best Muslim home is the one in which an orphan is treated with kindness, and the worst is that in which the orphan is treated unkindly."

Towards his wives and ladies, the Messenger of Allah SA was the best among men. He was fair, kind and gentle to his wives and treated women with dignity and honor. He helped his wives when at home and talked to them with kindness and joked and laughed with them. He was known to have commanded all Muslims to be good to women as well and to protect them and their rights. And he gave precedence to their well-being and would regularly give personal audience their concerns and problems.

Towards parents, the Holy Prophet SA taught the greatest benevolence, instructing that Paradise lies at the feet of our mothers and to serve our parents in old age and show respect and honor to them as they showed us mercy and love as helpless infants. Even in the cases of those having parents who disbelieved and who were belligerent to Islam, the Prophet SA commanded that they, too, should be served and treated with kindness and respect.

One aspect of the Prophet's benevolence that is often overlooked is his great concern towards even the welfare of animals ...

Once, his companions asked, "O Messenger of Allah, is there recompense in the matter of beasts and wild animals also?" to which Prophet Muhammad SA replied: There is recompense in regard to every creature that has a living heart."

In this way, he taught that the commandments to act kindly and justly to humankind extend to animals as well. He was very particular regarding the treatment of animals, demanding that they be treated with compassion. He was known to have never struck an animal and gave adamant instructions that they should not be overloaded nor overworked, but instead properly watered, fed, and rested. Prophet Muhammad SA even once rebuked his followers for taking the young from a bird's nest as it put the mother bird in great distress. He commanded them, "Who has hurt the feelings of this bird by taking its young? Return them to her" (Muslim). Once he admonished his wife Aisha for handling her camel in a rough manner by saying "It behooves you to treat the animals gently." (Muslim)

Regarding the slaughter of animals the Messenger of Allah SA instructed, "...when you slaughter an animal, you should use the best method and sharpen your knife so as to cause the animal as little pain as possible." (Muslim). Even further, he once saw a man who was sharpening his knife in front of an animal to slaughtered - he asked him, "Do you intend on inflicting death on the animal twice - once by sharpening the knife within its sight, and once by cutting its throat?" (Al-Furu Min-al-Kafi Lil-Kulini).

The Prophet SA once became very upset when he saw a donkey branded on the face and immediately forbid such cruel practice. He stated, "A good deed done to a beast is as good as doing good to a human being; while an act of cruelty to a beast is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being" (Bukhari).

In all aspects of his life and towards all of Allah's creation, he was kind and benevolent. He once said: "Allah loves kindness when you deal with any matter" (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Abdullah Ibn Masud (ra) reported Allah's Messenger SA as saying, "Shall I tell you about the man who is kept away from Hell, and from whom Hell is kept away? From the person who is gentle and kind, accessible and of an easy disposition."

The Holy Prophet Muhammad SA instilled his own benevolence into his companions at every turn with these instructions and examples. All of his actions were geared towards building mutual love, peace and justice between people.

"You will not enter Paradise until you have faith and you will not have faith until you love one another. Do you want me to tell you something you can do to make you love one another? Make it a habit to greet one another with "Assalaamu Alaykum" – peace be upon you". (Muslim)

This simple greeting that many of us take for granted is an ongoing practical method to create love and benevolence between the believers, provided it is said with sincere meaning and conviction - that is, that we really wish peace and love on one another when we say it. It is this constant reminder of the essence of our faith and well-wishing towards others that builds love between believers.

Another advice the Prophet gave was: "Give gifts to each other, as this will make you love one another." (Muslim) He was known to give gifts himself and distribute wealth with no personal greediness whatsoever.

Rasoolullah SA instructed Muslims and he himself visited the sick and tended to the poor. This is considered one of the most meritorious acts a Muslim can do. He often encouraged those around him to give to their neighbors and the less fortunate. He instructed to add water to the cooking pots to make soup and to share with neighbors. His followers, consequently, many times shared their meals and gladly gave everything that they had in their possession.

Often times nowadays, Muslims are confronted by the ignorant who ask, "Where are the miracles of the Muhammad?". We Muslims usually respond with various answers such as the miracles of The Holy Quran, the Prophet's SA true prophecies, his successful prophethood and the meteoric rise and spread of Islam. All of these things are, of course, true. I would add one more miracle to our Beloved Chief - that is, the miracle of his perfect benevolence towards all of humankind and all of Allah's creation. That alone was miracle enough to reform the world once and bring about peace and justice in the world and today it is still miracle enough to keep bringing about yet another spiritual revolution in those who sip from the cup of those memories and examples.

The Prophet Jesus AS once warned people to "Beware of the leavening of the Pharisées". What he meant by this was for people to be careful of the type of 'faith' or belief that came about by listening to the hard-hearted and ignorant religious leaders of the day. That same warning applies to every day and age. Many of the Muslims of the

world have missed the real essence of the faith which is the grand benevolence by which the Holy Prophet SA taught and lived. In missing this crucial aspect of his being, they remain stuck in the fitna and trials promised to the Muslims of this turbulent age. It is only through reviving this true spirit of benevolence - that is, of kindness, of well-wishing, of forgiveness, of charity, and of humility - that they can regain their success in this world and earn paradise in the next.

It is important to note that it is an essential part of the mission of the Promised Messiah AS to revive this true image of Muhammad SA for the world to see. He is the witness mentioned in the Quran and the hadith who would come forth with no other mission than to defend and revive the honor and benevolent nature of the Holy Prophet Muhammad SA and dispel the evil interpretations that had penetrated the Muslims and disbelievers alike.

May Allah continue to spread this miracle of the true and right image and demeanor of the Holy Prophet SA far and wide - and let it deeply affect and reform our hearts and return peace once again to the Muslims and to the entire earth. Ameen