

Contributing to World Peace - An Examination of the Life of Prophet Muhammad as a Leader

Recep Dogan

Centre for Islamic Sciences & Civilization (CISAC), Faculty of Arts, Charles Sturt University

*Corresponding Author: rdogan@csu.edu.au

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to closely examine the life and leadership skills of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in order to discover conflict resolution strategies adopted by the leading figure of Islam and evaluate those lessons to ascertain possible solutions to the contemporary global problems and challenges across the globe. Understanding is the catalyst for peace. This paper also aims to contribute to world peace and interfaith dialogue albeit its limited capacity in scope through the illustration of the exemplary character of this well-known persona who is not otherwise very well understood in largely the non-Muslim world but also within the Muslim world. Particular attention is paid to the identification of key attributes of a successful leader in the light of Muhammad (pbuh)'s success. A cross-examination of the evidence available to us, it is strongly noteworthy that Muhammad (pbuh) showed great respect for other faiths, cultures and ideas; even when he did not agree on certain matters, he listened and engaged with tolerance and sensitive care. His service of what he ardently believed to be the truth and his style and approach in dealing with would oppose those beliefs provides an acute insight on the character of this leading figure of Islam whose success in overcoming almost impossible barriers and conflicts at many layers of society becomes a strong case-study for modeling conflict resolutions beyond its theoretical frameworks and examine this applied science in the art of leadership and peace building. This paper would then conclude that one of the greatest legacies of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is the essential appreciation of the dignity of all living beings irrespective of their gender, race or societal status; with Muhammad's followers from diverse socio-cultural and socio-lingual backgrounds, ethnicities, civilizational development – this essential attribute becomes noteworthy to examine closely the veracity of his appreciation, respect and dignity afforded to all.

Keywords Interfaith Dialogue, World Peace, Leadership of Muhammad, Respect to Other Faiths, Conflict Resolution

1. Introduction

Since the dawn of human civilization, arguably there has been two categorical currents – that of social cohesion and harmony and arguably a larger part of discord, disharmony through mass destructions and weaponry. With the speedy advent of technology as well as science propelled with modern means of communication the increasingly shrinking global village has witnessed at least couple of centuries' bloody wars, conflict, mass killings and ongoing violations of universal principles. Just the 20th century bore two major and most destructive of bloodiest world wars alone. Considering that religions continue to have many adherents, if people adhering to religious beliefs and those with cultural values of harmony and concord came together and established a platform for dialogue – an authentic level of understanding amongst these different traditions can be fostered which can lead to higher levels of collaboration and mutual understanding. The vacuum that misunderstanding or lack of engagement creates becomes an attractive zone for myriad of assumptions which leads to conflict and 'fear of the unknown'. Undoubtedly what the world needs today are religious leaders who are well versed in their own traditional values and brings forth inspiration to their adherents to follow suit the essence of their faith. This paper will argue the inherent capacity of Islam as a faith tradition to instill a reconciliatory and peaceful spirit in its adherents through the model of its leading religious figure – Muhammad (pbuh) as the prototype of peace in the midst of diversity and conflict.

To associate Islam with terrorism is a great historical mistake. Ensuing discussion will explore this argument against fanaticism. Such is the premise of Qur'an towards justice: "Let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice."¹ Greeting and wishing safety and security upon others is considered one of the most beneficial acts in Islam.² Islamically, peace is of utmost importance to Islam. How such a theoretical

¹ Ali Ünal, *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, 1 vols. (New Jersey, USA: The Light, Inc., 2008).

² Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Imara 33 (Lahore Sh. M. Ashraf 1984). 142.

framework was modeled in practice becomes our focus. To elucidate the topic under discussion, I will endeavor to mention some of the essential characteristics of Prophet Muhammad as well as cite some relevant occasions that exemplify each attribute in relation to conflict resolution.

2. Characteristics of Leadership of Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) most noteworthy legacies is his leadership in transforming a society otherwise immersed in centuries of feudal conflicts and disarray. This change from an otherwise destructive and fragile social relationships towards a strongly cohesive nation and "ummah" a constructive society serves as a remarkable case-study. Before Islam, Arabia historically and socially was considered one of the most backward regions of the world, in terms of its cultural, intellectual and moral life standards. Limited by time and means, Prophet Muhammad eradicated all kinds of barbarism and savagery in the Arabian Peninsula and then embedded praiseworthy virtues in their hearts.³

One key trait with the Prophet (pbuh) was his consultative and authentic approach towards people and issues. The Prophet established this principle among his followers by counselling them even about his personal affairs, The Prophet said; "whoever takes counsel, does not regret it in the end."⁴ He consulted with his Companions before Badr, their first major battle. The Muslim forces consisted of 305 or 313 soldiers, whilst the Meccan army was around 1000 men. Representatives from the Emigrants and the Helpers declared their obedience to follow the Prophet wherever he led them. Despite this, the Prophet consulted with them about the battle at Badr.⁵

In developing universal values compatible to human nature; he sought not only the happiness of his followers exclusively, but happiness to all of humanity in all time and place. The following example from the pre-prophetic life of Muhammad explains this attribute clearly; The Ka'ba was partly damaged by rain and floods at a time when Muhammad (pbuh) had not announced his prophethood yet. The Quraysh wanted to renovate it and each tribe took the responsibility of repairing some part of the Ka'ba. However, an intertribal conflict almost broke out over the issue of who would put the sacred Black Stone back to its proper place, because it was a great honor for them. Following a heated debate that went on for some time, one of the leaders of Quraysh suggested that the first man who enters the yard of Ka'ba from a specific gate would be chosen as an arbitrator and everyone without any dispute would accept

his decision. They all accepted this offer and after a short time, the Prophet appeared at the gate. When they saw the Prophet, they said, 'The trustworthy one has come!' a name he was already known by, before he claimed and announced his Prophethood. The Quraysh leaders then explained the problem and solicited a solution from him. There upon the Prophet asked them to bring a piece of cloth. When it was provided, he spread it on the ground and he placed the Black Stone on it. After that, he invited each tribe leader to hold the cloth from each corner. They lifted it to the level of the slot where the Black Stone would be placed and then Muhammad pushed it into its place. The imminent intertribal war was prevented by a wise and rapid decision.⁶ Addressing the needs of humanity, these universal values afforded them real happiness whilst coexisting peacefully due to the acceptance of people of differing races, religious backgrounds, intellectual levels, ages and all walks of life.⁷

To be an effective leader requires enduing relationships and facilitating an intrinsic motivation within followers to cooperate and themselves proactively engage in peace-seeking method when overcoming conflict, (achieves the love and reliance of their people and is supported in as much as they solve their problems and the challenges and problems can be individual, social, private or public political, economic or social affairs.⁸ Throughout history, despotic rulers have been found to resort to power, oppression, censorship, prohibitions, punishments, and torture to solve their problems. However, such solutions have only short-term benefits, whilst additionally creating more widespread problems and disarray in the long term. Once, Husayn, an eloquent speaker famous for his convincing and effective speech, came to the Prophet and tried to defeat him in a debate. Muhammad (pbuh) listened respectfully to the arguments put forward by Husayn and after he asked the following questions to him:

- Husayn, how many gods do you worship?
- Eight; one in the Heavens and the others on Earth.
- Which one do you call upon when misfortune befalls you?
- The one in the Heavens.
- Which one do you call upon when your wealth and property are gone?
- The one in the Heavens.
- Which one do you call upon when there is no rain?
- The one in the Heavens.
- Which one do you call upon when there is famine?
- The one in the Heavens.

The Prophet continued to ask similar questions and received the same answer to each question. After that, he said, "According to your answers, the one in the Heavens alone meets all your needs; however you associate partners with

³ Recep Dogan, "Muhammad" in; "Spiritual Leaders Studies in leadership for a pluralist society", edited by Seforosa Carroll and William W Emilsen, (Canberra, Australia: Barton Books, 2014) 115.

⁴ Nur al-Din 'Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Haythami, *al-Majma' al-Zawaid wa Manba' al-Fawaid*, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah Beirut, Lebanon 2001 vol.2, p. 280.

⁵ Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, vol.3, p. 162.

⁶ Abd al-Malik Ibn Hisham, *al-Sīrah Nabawiyya, al-Maktabah al-Tawfiqiyya*, Cairo 1978, vol.1, p. 209.

⁷ John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad* (London & Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2010). 31.

⁸ M. Fethullah Gulen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad* (New Jersey: The Light Publishing, 2005). 261-262.

Him. Isn't this what I have been teaching?"⁹ The Leader Muhammad assessed the mentality of his addressee and talked to him in his level. As a result, he gained the hearth of Husayn with a friendly conversation.

The unwavering nature of a leader and a sense of consistency in character, vision and approach establishes secure and trusting relationships. Muhammad (pbuh) managed this trait to details. He had absolute confidence and belief in his message. He had strong willpower and determination which is an inherent praiseworthy characteristic of a true leader. His belief never weakened, and his mission was never forsaken. Even when left alone, he continued his mission. The Treaty of Hudaibiya is a good example to elaborate this aspect of the Prophet. In 6 AH, the Messenger told his Companions he had a dream that indicated they would soon enter the Holy Mosque in Mecca, in security, with their heads shaved or their hair cut short. His Companions, especially the Emigrants, were delighted. During that year, the Prophet left Medina with 1,500 unarmed men in pilgrim dress (ihram) with an intention to visit Mecca. However, Quraysh took the necessary precautions to prevent the Prophet and the Muslims from entering Mecca. After lengthy deliberation, meetings and discussions with the Qurayshite leaders, the Prophet signed a treaty with them. Detested by his closest followers initially it was only some months later that his Prophetic wisdom was manifested. This historic document is considered as victory for several reasons;¹⁰

- Quraysh admitted that Muslims were their equals by signing this treaty. This treaty showed that Quraysh finished their fight against Islam. This treaty affected the rest of the Arabian Peninsula and they started to convert to Islam in groups.
- The peace environment provided suitable conditions for the leaders of Quraysh such as Khalid ibn Walid, 'Amr ibn al-'As, and 'Uthman ibn Talha to think about Islam freely and as a result they accepted it.
- Quraysh had claimed that the Ka'ba is subject to their authority exclusively and they put tax upon the visitors. This treaty ended their monopoly over Ka'ba. The Arabian tribes realized that Quraysh could no longer claim exclusive rights over Ka'ba.
- When the treaty was signed, they were some Muslims who lived in Mecca secretly and most of the Companions did not know them. If there was a war between the two armies, those Muslims could have been killed by friendly fire. The treaty barred such a tragedy.

To be able to shift the deeply held paradigms amidst diverse range of followers is another noteworthy characteristic of an effective and leader whose social intelligence and interpersonal relationships are acute. For instance, the deeply held notions of racial vilification and

racism whilst prevalent in Pre-Islamic Arabia was almost eradicated with the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). On one occasion when there surfaced a residual effect of such attitude, the following took place. Abu Dharr, (Arab Companion of the Prophet) insulted Bilal in anger: "You son of a black woman!" Bilal came to the Messenger and reported the incident in tears. The Prophet reproached Abu Dharr: "Do you still have a sign of jahiliyyah (ignorance)?" Full of repentance, Abu Dharr laid down on the ground and said, "I will not raise my head (meaning that he would not get up) unless Bilal puts his foot on it." Bilal forgave him, and they were reconciled.¹¹ Such level of sensitivity reflective of a deeply rooted paradigm to readily overcome and effectively addressed is indicative of a mentoring and leadership potential whose understanding of his people and engaging with them at levels that transformed their characters and outlooks to peaceful and cohesive ways is insightful of the leader's social competence, and deep understanding of his people, context and thereby his delivery of his message. Muhammad himself prohibited verbal abuse of unbelievers. Abu Jahl (father of ignorance and impudence) died before embracing Islam, despite all the Prophet's efforts. Due to his unbelief and extreme enmity towards Muslims, the title Abu Jahl was given to him. Despite his constant hostility and attack on Islam and Muslims, Prophet Muhammad once admonished a Companion who had insulted Abu Jahl while his son Ikrimah was present: "Do not hurt others by criticizing their fathers."¹²

3. Open Dialogue with Different Faith Groups

The objective of a dialogue should be to enable the truth to transpire rather than defeating the other party at the cost of truth. In order to achieve a positive result in an exchange of ideas, principles such as mutual understanding, respect, and dedication to justice should be implemented. Debates should take place in an environment that promotes interfaith dialogue, mutual respect and friendship with different religions. With this purpose, God commanded Muhammad to engage in interfaith dialogue with the people of scriptures; "Say (to them, O Messenger): "O People of the Book, come to a word common between us and you, that we worship none but God, and associate none as partner with Him, and that none of us take others for Lords, apart from God."¹³

An example that stands out was the Christian delegation's visit to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) At the time of Prophet Muhammad, a Christian group visited him to learn about Islam. During their visit, they asked for permission from the Prophet to perform their Christian

⁹ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Al-Isāba Fi Tamyīz al-Sahābah*, Dar Nahdat, Egypt 1970, vol.1, p. 337.

¹⁰ Gulen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad*, pp. 267-272.

¹¹ Muhammad ibn Ismail Bukhari, *Al-Jāmi' Al-Sahih*, Iman (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 1997). 22.

¹² Al-'ad-Din 'Ali Ibn-Husām-ad-Din al- Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz Al-'Ummal Fi Sunan Al-Aqwāl Wa-'L-A'fāl*, vol. 13 (Beirut Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1990). 540.

¹³ (3:64)

rituals, in particular their Sunday mass. In response and as an extension of his hospitality Prophet Muhammad offered his mosque/masjid. The Prophet accepted their request. Later, an open debate between the Christian clergy and the Prophet took place in the masjid for this service to take place. The Prophet explained to them the tenets of Islam and attempted to convince them of their veracity. The conversation with the Christians resulted in a peace treaty which contained the following details;¹⁴ Christians have the right to live in safety and for their property to be protected, churches are not to be harmed nor monasteries closed, and priests are not to be impeded in doing their duties. Moreover, Christians were not to be compelled to provide supplies for Muslims during times of war and nor was it permitted to interfere with or interrupt Christian worship. Such precedent was set about fourteen centuries ago.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) social intelligence and employment of clear Qur'anic injunctions in practice fostered a healthy interfaith and dialogue between the different Arabian tribes and communities. This call, made by Islam 14 centuries ago to the People of the Book, is still being made to the People of the Book and people of learning today; is of great significance. The verse highlights how various consciences, nations, religions and books can unite on one essential conscience and word of truth, and how Islam has instructed the human realm in such a wide, open and true path of salvation and laws of freedom.¹⁵ It has been evidenced that interfaith dialogue is not limited to Arab or non-Arab people, rather religious progress is possible by expanding universally and in unison and not by being separate from one another.¹⁶ There is no place for repulsive manners, condemnation and rudeness in conveying the Islamic message.¹⁷ Islam embraces the whole of humanity with gentle invitation, especially the followers of scriptures as they have more commonalities between them. The verse implies that what they were being invited to were not very strange to their current following. Having been exposed to such notions long before Islam the Qur'an first invited the people of previous scriptures to open debate. With this invitation, Islam aimed to build a bridge between the Muslims and the People of the Books, in order to encourage peace. In order for the truth to manifest itself clearly, it was quintessential to engage in interfaith dialogue. This verse establishes the linking bridge where different souls, minds, cultures and civilizations can come together. It builds a bridge of reconciliation and draws a line joining the books revealed at different times and the People following these books, a line we can call *the line of peace and reconciliation*.¹⁸

Although Prophet Muhammad was commanded to convey

his message, he never forced people to accept it, because God told him; "there is no compulsion in the Religion. The right way stands there clearly distinguished from the false..."¹⁹ Through friendly conversations and open debates, he used logical arguments to convince the population. Debates even took place in his masjid in front of his followers. This freedom to accept without compulsion was displayed in situations where some of his followers had such freedom to refuse some of the religious obligations and declared such refusals publicly. One day, a young man (Julaybib) asked God's Messenger for permission to fornicate, since he could not control himself. Those who were present reacted in various ways; some scoffed at him, whilst others pulled his robe. But the Prophet asked him to approach and then he spoke to him gently. He began by asking: "Would you let someone do this with your mother?" to which the young man replied, "Of course not, O Messenger of God, may my mother and father be sacrificed to you!" The Prophet said, "Naturally, no one would wish such thing upon their mother". He then continued asking Julaybib the same question, but this time using the sister, wife and aunty as an example. Each time Julaybib replied that he would not agree to such an act. By the end of the conversation, Julaybib had lost all desire to fornicate. Then the Prophet prayed for Julaybib by placing his hands over his chest: "O God, forgive him, purify his heart, and maintain his chastity." Following the Prophet's prayer Julaybib became a role model of chastity and he was martyred in a battle. After his martyrdom, the Prophet said, "This one is of me, and I am of him."²⁰

Worthy leaders shows respect towards other people's ideas and faiths. Even though they may not agree with some of their opinions, they listen with tolerance and respect. In his exemplary lifestyle, Muhammad always entertained other faith groups with great respect even though he did not agree with them on some issues. He believed that world peace would only be achieved by showing mutual respect amongst different faith groups. There are many examples in the life of Muhammad that evidence the respect he afforded other faith groups. On one occasion, a funeral procession passed by a group of Muslims who were sitting with the Prophet. The Prophet stood up in respect and his Companions followed his example. After the procession passed, they said rather puzzled, 'O God's Apostle! This is the funeral procession of a Jew'. Thereupon the Prophet said, 'Isn't he a human being?'²¹ He sometimes visited the religious schools of the Jews to ensure that there were no restrictions on their freedom to learn and teach their religion.²² It is also recorded that he visited Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in order to foster understanding and to put an end to the interreligious enmity

¹⁴ Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabarī, *Jami Al-Bayan an Ta'wil Al-Qur'an*, vol. 3 (Beirut Alam al-Kutub Publishing, 1992). 162-163.

¹⁵ Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, vol. 2 (İstanbul Azim Dağıtım, 2007). 1131.

¹⁶ Ibid. 1132.

¹⁷ M. Fethullah Gulen, *Reflections on the Qur'an: Commentaries on Selected Verses* (New Jersey: Tughra Books Publishing, 2012). 68.

¹⁸ Ibid. 71

¹⁹ (2:256)

²⁰ Muslim, *Sahih*, Fadail Sahābah, 131.

²¹ Bukhari, *Sahih*, *Jana'iz*, 50.

²² Abdullah b. 'Umar al-Baydawī, *Anwar Al-Tanzil*, Commentary on Al-Baqara 2:91 (Cairo 1912).

and hatred.²³

At the time of his death, a person of Medina belonging to the Jewish faith was in possession of a shield belonging to Muhammad, which he had given as surety for a debt.²⁴ This historical fact shows that the Jewish people in Medina experienced real freedom when dealing with their Muslim neighbors and with the Prophet himself. Muhammad always protected the rights and freedom of people in Medina regardless of their race, religion and position in society. He honored those beliefs and treated them with sincere courtesy and respect. When a delegation of Christians from Najran came to negotiate a pact with the Prophet (pbuh), he courteously allowed them to pray in the mosque that lasted the whole day.²⁵

Muhammad showed good neighborliness in his personal relations with the People of the Book and introduced exemplary conduct, compassion and generosity in his relationship with the people from other traditions. Once the prominent Companion of Muhammad 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr shared his meat with his Jewish neighbor and explained the reason as follows: "I heard the Messenger of Allah, say, "Archangel Gabriel kept on recommending that I treat my neighbors well until I thought that he would order me to treat them as my heirs.""²⁶ Muhammad not only showed his generosity to the People of the Book but also accepted their hospitality. Several times the Jews in Medina invited him to dinner or to lunch and he gladly accepted their invitation.²⁷ He never discriminated between people on the grounds of religious preferences when he dealt with them. I would like to conclude this topic with a final example, which was his last statements on his deathbed: "I entrust to you the Jews and Christians who are People of the Book."²⁸ What this meant was that he wanted the Muslims to treat the People of the Book, who lived under Muslim rule justly, as he had done in his lifetime, and not to persecute or insult them in a way unbecoming to a Muslim.²⁹

These few examples prove that Muhammad showed great respect to all people from different faiths and traditions throughout his life. He always sought after having good relationships with different faith groups on the basis of religious freedom, human rights and mutual respect. He never discriminated amongst people on the basis of their religious backgrounds. However, there are some fundamentalist groups who do not understand the Prophet Muhammad well enough and have biases against other faith groups, which have resulted in continuous animosity and attacks against Muslims by particular individuals. Meanwhile, there is no prohibition in Islam to be in continuous dialogue with Christians, Jews and those of other faiths.

²³ Tabarī, *Jami al-Bayan an Ta'wil al-Qur'an*, p 162-163.

²⁴ Bukhari, *Sahih, Jihad*, 89.

²⁵ Ibn Hishām, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyya*, vol. 2 (Cairo al-Maktabah al-Tawfiqiyya Publishing, 1978). 224.

²⁶ Al-Bukhari, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, Neighbors, 105.

²⁷ Ahmad bin Hanbel, *Musnad*, vol. 5 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2012). 210.

²⁸ al-Ash'ath, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*.

²⁹ Ahmet Kurucan & Mustafa Kasim Erol, *Dialogue in Islam Qur'an, Sunnah, History* (London Dialogue Society, 2012). 73.

Such admonishments were related directly with Muhammad's character, because everyone reflects their own character with the actions they portray. He was full of love towards the entire creation for he knew that love was the reason for its existence and its essence - and it is the strongest tie that binds creatures together. Everything in the universe is the handiwork of God; therefore, if you do not approach humanity, a creation of God, with love, then you will have hurt those who love God and those whom God loves.³⁰ In this respect, not only humans from different faith traditions but also animals and other animate creatures were created with a nature that is worthy of being embraced by us with love.

4. Peace Maker

Prophet Muhammad always aimed to build peace amongst all people. Utilizing every opportunity for this purpose, he put great effort to achieve it. Even though the conditions were against him and his followers, he still chose to sign the peace treaty, because in his mind peace was always better. I will mention an example to elaborate this characteristic of leader Muhammad; the Medina constitution that was signed between the disbeliever Arabs, Jews and Muslims.

The immigration of Muhammad to Medina increased political tensions. At the time the Jewish leader Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul was due to become leader of Medina but this became impossible by the incoming Muslim population. Recognizing the tension and its underlying cause, Prophet Muhammad solved all the problems respectively which he faced. One of the problems that required an urgent solution was counting the Medina population and determining the different ethnic and religious groups. This census was necessary in establishing a common ground in order to create a peaceful atmosphere for all. After counting the population, they noticed that there were 1500 Muslims, 4000 Jews and 4500 Arab unbelievers. The peace, which includes all the parties, was a dire necessity for the residents of Medina since there had intertribal wars for a long time and they were exhausted by it. The disunity and the conflicts among the different groups had damaged the society to a large extent; hence they wanted long term peace to be upheld in their city.

The presence of Jews and other minorities living in Medina eventually led to communal tensions within the city. As a mark of the prophet's skillful leadership, he eased the tension between Muslims and non-Muslims by preparing a pact that ensured the rights of citizenship for all groups in Medina. This document, which some scholars consider it to be Medina's first constitution, not only helped reduce tensions within the city, it conveyed Muhammad as a conciliator, one who was able to bring people together for the good of the city. The Prophet did not discriminate or marginalize people from different backgrounds, faiths and

³⁰ Gulen, *Toward Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*. 50.

ethnic groups; rather he embraced them all under the common pact.³¹ It is noteworthy that political scientists today sometimes turn to the Medina constitution as a resource and model in their search for new political administrative models suited to the changing and developing world.³²

In short, the Medina constitution is a social structure that managed differences based on an agreement under principles that adhered to justice and equity in determining rights and duties; and which promoted common interests under a pluralist, participatory and unitary political umbrella based on lawfulness and equality before the law.³³

5. Advocate of Human Rights

One of the essential leadership characteristics that Prophet Muhammad strongly established was to the protection of human rights – which even precedes his Prophetic mission. In light of this characteristic, he abolished many inhumane customs and beliefs.

When examining Muhammad's life it becomes a pattern noteworthy that there was an authentic recognition by Muhammad (pbuh) of differences and diversity. He saw people as equals and abolished racism in all shapes and forms. Once he said; "All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action"³⁴ and "even if a black Abyssinian Muslim were to rule over Muslims, he should be obeyed".³⁵ Muhammad removed racism and discrimination successfully and effectively. For example, 'Umar said: 'Bilal is our master, and was emancipated by our master Abu Bakr'.³⁶ Bilal was black but 'Umar had given him the title: *our master*. Another example is Zayd ibn Haritha, a black slave emancipated by the Prophet. The Prophet helped him to marry Zaynab bint Jahsh, one of the noblest Arab women. In addition, he selected Zayd as the commanders of the Muslim army while the leading Companions such as Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Ja'far ibn Abū Tālib, and Khalid ibn Walid were among the soldiers.³⁷ Through such practices, the Prophet imprinted in the hearts of the Muslims that superiority is not by birth, color or blood, but by morality and piety.

Respect to humanity was established as a rule. Gender discrimination wasn't an exception. I. He once said; "The most perfect believers are the best in character, and the best of you are the kindest to their wives".³⁸ In his farewell sermon, The Prophet warned his followers about protecting

and upholding women's rights; "O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. So treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers."³⁹

The prophet was very polite and friendly in order that all the women could feel comfort and act as they wished without being worried about consequences of their acts. Umar reports;

"One day I went to the Prophet and saw him smiling. "May God make you smile forever, O Messenger of God," I said, and asked why he was smiling. "I smile at those women. They were chatting in front of me before you came. When they heard your voice, they all vanished." On hearing this answer, I raised my voice and told them: "O enemies of your own selves, you are scared of me, but you are not scared of the Messenger of God, and you don't show respect to him." "You are hard-hearted and strict," they replied.⁴⁰

The Prophet was directed by God, but still consulted the matters with his wives to show them his love and respect. He also wanted to present the best model in terms of how to treat wives and taking their opinions in every matter. It was a unique act since people used to consider the women as valueless objects just two decades earlier. The treaty of Hudaibiya is an example for how the Prophet consulted with his wife Umm Salama and acted upon her advice. The Muslims found the conditions of the treaty of Hudaibiya very hard, and therefore were reluctant to go back to Medina without the making the pilgrimage. However, Prophet Muhammad ordered them to remove their pilgrim attire. They did not fulfill the order in spite he repeated it to them couple of times. Thereupon he consulted this matter with his wife Umm Salama. She replied, "O Messenger of God, don't repeat your order lest they disobey you and perish. Sacrifice your own animals and take off your pilgrim dress (*ihram*). When they understand the order is decisive, they'll obey you without hesitation."⁴¹ He did as she suggested and the Companions fulfilled the order this time.

5. Conclusions

With effective leadership, Prophet Muhammad resolved conflicts with ease. His conflict resolution may inspire modern scholars in promoting interfaith dialogue in promoting world peace. Muhammad is still the most effective and influential personality for Muslims and educating and practicing his teachings and lifestyle in its truest forms can contribute to creating peace in their individual, family and social lives. His great respect to

³¹ Abu'l-Fida Ismail Ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya Wa'n-Nihāya*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Daru'l-Maarif, n.d.). 224.

³² Erol, *Dialogue in Islam Qur'an, Sunnah, History*. 74.

³³ Erol, *Dialogue in Islam Qur'an, Sunnah, History*. 75.

³⁴ Ahmed bin Hanbel, *Musnad*, 5. 441.

³⁵ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, *Imara* 37.

³⁶ al-'Asqalānī, *Al-Isāba Fī Tamyiz Al-Saḥābah*, 1. 65.

³⁷ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, *Fadāil Saḥābah* 63.

³⁸ Abu Dāwūd, *Sunan, Sunnah* 15.

³⁹ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, *Hajj* 1623.

⁴⁰ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, *Adab*, 68.

⁴¹ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, *Shurut*: 15.

different faiths and through his exemplary conduct, he taught Muslims to live together with other faith groups peacefully.

Upholding universal values and constantly seeking the truth, he provided morals and ethical values that can be applied everywhere regardless of time and conditions. His resilience and strong focus on protecting and fostering human rights sent a strong message which promotes peace and acceptance. His teachings that human beings are the best art of God and loving them without any discrimination is indeed loving God Himself saw that human, aside from their social, cultural, economic and political difference treated each other with respect and love. His teachings meant that sincere love for humanity could and will be achieved by respecting all people from different colors, ethnic backgrounds, faiths, cultures and nations. The prophet stands as an exemplary leader from whose life we can extract remedies for contemporary problems we face in our society. Through his example, the Prophet demonstrated his teachings through his own personal action, believing that a leader must first be prepared to practice his or her own personal beliefs before expecting it of others.

The continuing success of the then young Islamic state deeply cemented the exemplary leadership style of Muhammad as the lifestyle to follow, emulate and imitate. His closest followers (Companions), through their fervor and observance of the specific actions and sayings of the prophet (Sunnah) passed on this legacy to the many generations and communities of the Islamic Ummah (nation) down through the centuries.

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