

A perfect reformer

Islam
Dawn
14.5.04

By Prof Mohammed Rafi

Friday feature

TODAY, more than ever, the Muslim world needs to look back at the practical aspects of the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) life and try to imbibe them in our daily lives for peace and harmony. This is what Islam is all about. When Muslims accept some person as a Nabi (Messenger), they must as well believe in emulating the example set by the Nabi.

It is understood that anything actually taught by the Nabi was either done or would have been done by him had the occasion arisen. The Quran tells us that all Messengers were charged by Allah with the same mission (2:136). It is also written that all people are a single nation, so Allah raised Messengers as bearers of His news and as warners and He revealed unto them the Book with truth (2:213).

In other words the message that comes from Allah of human guidance is a practicable verity and not a dreamer's ideal. Prophet Mohammad received Divine Revelation and translated it into action through his own example (2:129 & 151). He was the first to obey these laws (39:11-14) and led others to pursue the path of guidance.

Earlier Messengers had come with Allah's message and guidance, but people changed these, corrupted them or simply hid them. The Quran says 'O people of the Book there has come to you Our Messenger revealing to you much that you used to hide in the Book' (5:15).

Pre-Islamic Arabia was a seat of different religions and sects, each decrying the other as being done nowadays. Prophet Mohammad denounced division and sectarianism and decried the hostile attitude of the followers of these separate religions and sects. 'And the Jews say that the Christians do not follow anything good, and the Christians say that the Jews do not follow anything good while they recite the same book' (2:213). People were more inclined, like today, on rituals which were supposed to be the essence of all religions.

The Quran says, 'It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East or West, but righteousness (Taqwa) is that one should believe in Allah, the day of judgment, the Malaika, the Book and the Messengers and give away wealth out of love for Him to the nearest of kin and to the orphans, the needy and the wayfarer. The captives pray and pay Zakat and fulfil the performance of their promises and be patient in distress and adversity and in time of conflict. Such are the righteous ones' (2:177).

Prophet Mohammad did not propagate Islam through miracles. He worked what was more than a miracle: striving against odds and achieved success never seen before or since in history, and in the adverse circumstances to which he had been subjected. But to achieve this unique success he did not resort to things beyond human reach, in which case he could not have acted as an exemplary personality.

He used all honest and honourable means that were open to others. He would plainly say that he was a man like others (18:110) and 'It is not in my power to cause you harm or bring you to the right path' (72:21) and 'The unseen is only known to Allah (10:20) 'with

triumphs awakened no pride or vain glory, as they would have done had they been effected for selfish purposes. If he aimed at universal dominion, it was the dominion of the faith'. Gibbon writes in the 'Rise and fall of the Roman empire' that even at the zenith of his worldly power, the good sense of Mohammad despised the pomp of royalty.

How many of us claiming to be his followers practise what he advised to do? In Madinah he had the opportunity of practising what he had preached at Makkah. He ennobled and enlarged the laws of Moses and brought upon earth the kingdom of heaven prayed for by Jesus. He established a state with those at helm of affairs not ruling but serving the citi-

The spirit infused by the Holy Prophet enabled the Muslims to face courageously the most formidable foes that a man has to grapple with — one's own corrupt nature and evil habits. He understood human nature and mind and did not propose to kill our instincts or crush our passions. Instead he propounded a system to control them so that they may function to our best advantage and pass from the bestial to the noble.

zens. There was no prejudice of class, colour, race or descent.

To demolish this long prevailing social injustice, it was emphasized that the noblest in the sight of Allah was he who was most virtuous among men. The state belonged equally to one and all, male and female — and all, in turn, belonged to one universal God, all obeyed one law, not man-made but sent down from the All Merciful and impartial God, which was the same for rich and poor alike.

His life was very simple. He would put on whatever kind or quality of cloth he could get. He would eat whatever was placed before him. He would sit wherever he could find room, whether on a mat, carpet or the ground (Tirmizi 'Shumail').

Unlike the rulers of the modern world, he entered into treaties with his enemies and honoured them. Following the treaty of Hudaibiah in 6 A.H., he discouraged the Muslims of Makkah to flee the city. The surrender of Makkah offered him ample opportunities of revenge, but he did not avail himself of them. As a role model we must remember that he ordered us to obey Allah's commands, give alms, speak the truth, give back safe and whole what is entrusted to us by others, to be affectionate to our neighbours, to shun wicked acts and avoid bloody quarrels.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says: "It is easy to make good and far reaching plans, but more difficult to carry them out. Moses, Jesus and many of the prophets before Mohammad did not live to see the success of their respective missions. The emancipated children of the Egyptian bondage repeatedly disobeyed Moses, Peter and other disciples denied their Master and left him in the moment of his dire need. But Mohammad the humble preacher to the haughty Makkans, who had only the other day been ridiculed, stoned and hunted out of

unique brotherhood. Those who cherished no respect for women became the foremost champions of female rights."

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Muslims today are more inclined towards an individual and self-conceited Islam for entry into heaven which lies somewhere beyond the sky. Mohammad pointed out the error of such crude notions. Heaven is the evolved condition of our soul, the casting or not casting of human passion into the mould

of divine attributes that makes our Heaven both here and in the hereafter — for the Quran promises two Heavens (55:46) and also its reverse — Hell. He repeatedly said that every person who seeks to observe good morals must tread God's earth reflecting Divine attributes.

Every Muslim should examine, search and assess his deeds and review his conduct several times a day. For this we were ordered to establish the system of 'Salaat' five times a day. This involves the total submission to the laws of Allah in a practical shape.

Mohammad also proposed greetings through "Salaam Alaikum" (Peace be upon

you) as As-Salaam is one of the attributes of Allah and means peace. The western equivalent of this is 'Have a nice day' which is oft repeated.

He also quashed a centuries old system of invoking God's mercy through an intermediary. This belief had crept into almost all religions. No religion of Divine origin in its subsequent stages remained free from it. Islam has no priestly class. Addressing Mohammad (PBUH), Allah says, "And when my servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am near; I answer the prayers of the supplicant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me, that they may find the right way" (2:186).

For the first time, the principle of 'No compulsion in religion' was enunciated and acted upon by Mohammad. Differences of opinion in religious matters were respected and freedom of conscience was allowed. History is full of religious persecutions of the worst type and that is evident even today.

Mohammad preached religious tolerance that had never been known before. To the Christians of Najran and adjoining areas he promised the security of God and his own pledge 'No cross or image shall be destroyed, they will not be oppressed, they shall not be required to furnish provisions for the troops' were his standing orders.

Today a large part of the wealth and brain of the West is expended in discovering ways in which they may utilize destructive weapons to pander to the spirit of aggression. Mohammad allowed the use of force in three conditions only 1) To protect a house of worship from destruction be it Christian, Jew or Muslim (22:40) (2) In self defence (22:39). (3) To establish freedom of conscience and fight religious persecution.

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One supreme quality that shows he had achieved the zenith of character and morality that must be the final goal of human endeavour, where man reflects Divine values, was his steadfastness. In victory or in defeat, in power or in adversity, he remained the same. According to Washington-Irving 'His military

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"These who had dwelt in a state of permanent warfare among themselves and had revelled in bloodshed and murder on the most trifling pretexts became wedded into a

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He was the first leader of a religion that made religion and science help-mates. He abolished dogma and made reason and logic the test of religious truth. He placed the cultivation of knowledge on top. For him, exploring the realms of nature for the benefit of humanity was the real glorification of God. He gave such an impetus to learning that it brought forth within a century after him a tremendous upheaval in the world of scientific research work.