**The lamp of guidance**

BY A B U Z E H R A 2021-10-19

THE blessed birth of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in Rabiul Awwal is celebrated by Muslim communities across the globe, particularly in South Asia, with great fervour and reverence. In Pakistan, efforts have been initiated at the state level to set up a Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority, using a title of the Holy Prophet used in the Quran (Surah Anbiya).  
  
While devotion and attachment with the blessed name of the Noble Messenger is necessary, equally important for those seeking to learn from his glorious example is to follow the moral precepts he gave, as elucidated in the Quran and the authentic ahadith. If we fail to do this, our devotion is at most half-hearted.  
  
Of course the Holy Quran is replete with moral teachings revealed to the Holy Prophet by the Almighty. It is another matter entirely that we who form part of his ummah have mostly failed to adopt these sterling precepts in our daily lives.  
  
One particular place in the Holy Quran where moral and ethical precepts have been grouped together beautifully is Surah Isra/ Bani Israel, the Holy Book`s 17th surah. It would not be an exaggeration to say that if we were to follow these moral principles, a sea change could be witnessed in our personal and public lives.  
  
Ayat 23 exhorts us to honour our parents and take care of them in their old age. While Pakistan remains a traditional, conservative society where the joint family system is still in vogue, we must ask ourselves if the instructions in this blessed verse are being acted upon. Indeed, the truth is the opposite, as we are seeing fissures within the family system. Therefore, respect for parents, as well as compassion and understanding from elders for youngsters, is essential to rebuild the family structure.  
  
In ayat 26 mankind is instructed to respect the rights of relatives as well as to help the poor. Maintaining the bonds of kinship ties up with the earlier ayat, where strengthening the extended family structure is concerned. As far as philanthropy goes, Pakistanis do indeed give a lot to the deserving as can be witnessed even in these times of rapid inflation and economic insecurity.  
  
However, instead of just ensuring the less fortunate are fed, they should be helped to stand on their feet, without hurting their dignity. Charity should be channelled into education and job training programmes to help others become self-sufficient.  
  
The next ayat condemns wastefulness.  
  
Here a lot of work can be done in society. For example, anyone who has attended a Pakistani wedding can testify to the fact that even many normal people turn intogluttons at marriage ceremonies, piling food high on their plates, and then wasting much of it. These wasteful practices need to be curbed and we can start early, teaching kids that wasting food is hugely unfair to others, and is also a burden on the environment.  
  
At other points in this surah believers are told to maintain fiscal probity, ie not to be miserly, and not to be spendthrifts either; not to kill; to protect the wealth of orphans; to be fair while weighing goods, and not to walk on the earth arrogantly.  
  
Indeed, all these are practical teachings manifested in the magnetic personality of the Holy Prophet, whom the Holy Book also terms a `Lamp of guidance` (Sirajum Munira, Surah Ahzab). Hence, those looking to follow in his footsteps need to ponder the teachings mentioned.  
  
If we wish to reform society, instead of setting up authorities change must begin with the self. We must asl( ourselves: am I guiltyof arrogance, deceitfulness, wastefulness etc? Unfortunately, in our society sermonising and outward display of religious practices prevail, while few talk aboutfixing our moral and ethical defects. It should be remembered that in ahadith literature, jihad against the nafs (base self) has been called the `greatest jihad`.  
  
Therefore, to truly follow the teachings of Rehmatul-lil-Alameen, those who wield power must shun arrogance and ostentation in favour of simplicity and moral transparency. It can be argued that as per the Quranic worldview, no society can be reformed until its elite shun corruption and crooked behaviour. This is another point for the rulers to ponder.  
  
The Holy Prophet was the ruler of a nascent state, yet he lived like ordinary people and sought no special privileges for himself or his family members, other than love for his `close ones` as air (reward) for his labours.  
  
Here, from the spirit of the Quran, two things appear abundantly clear: that the Noble Messenger was not interested in any worldly rewards, and that love for his `close ones`hasbeencommandedbythe Almighty.  
  
In conclusion, devotion must be coupled with examination and purification of the self in order to truly follow in the footsteps of Rehmatul-lil-Alameen.  The writer is a freelance contributor.