

The truth about Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)

Loving him is following him

Muslims all over the world are deeply hurt by the recent caricatures of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), in Danish and several other publications.

Every now and then, some Western media outlets provoke Muslims by insulting the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The baiting often succeeds in eliciting Muslims' outrage and sporadic violence.

The latest incident started with a Danish newspaper's caricature portraying the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a terrorist. To add insult to injury, Norwegian, French, German, Dutch and a few other newspapers reprinted the defamatory cartoons to "defend"—they claimed—the freedom of expression.

The real issue is not the freedom of expression. Free speech is not and was never meant to be absolute. There are laws in the West that ban certain kinds of speech, including those that incite anti-Semitism, racism and violence. Moreover, some countries have laws against blasphemy and defamation. To Muslims, banning blasphemy against Allah and the Prophet Muhammad has a higher priority.

For the European newspapers to reprint the offensive cartoons to show solidarity with their Danish counterpart seems akin to the plot the leaders of Quraysh had hatched to assassinate Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The Quraysh masterminds had figured that including representatives from major tribes of Makkah in the heinous plot would make it impossible for the Prophet's clan, Banu Hashim, to avenge. But Allah willed that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) would migrate to Madinah unscathed while the plotters laid siege to his house.

The West often underestimates the Muslims' reverence for their beloved Prophet Muhammad, (peace be upon him) and is, therefore, startled by the fierce Islamic reaction to an insult against him. Few in the West know that for Muslims, loving their Prophet more than themselves is a matter of faith, not choice.

Further, the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) , as a terrorist is a falsification of history. He was considered "Al-Ameen," the trustworthy, by his people even before he received the Prophethood.

Once, when asked by some of his followers to invoke Allah's wrath on the enemies, he (peace be upon him) refused saying he (peace be upon him) had been sent as a mercy unto mankind.

Objective Western intellectuals have acknowledged the superior character of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In his "The 100, a Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History," Michael H. Hart ranked Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) No. 1 because "He was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels."

Alphonse de Lamartine, a renowned 19th Century French writer, had this to say about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) : "As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than him?"

Unfortunately, some Muslims forget that loving their Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) means following him. Burning Danish embassies, as they did in Damascus and Beirut, to avenge the insult to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is a complete disservice to him. Our violent reaction only plays into the hands of those who wish to reinforce the negative stereotypes about Muslims.

Do Muslims need reminding that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), forgave the people of Ta'if who had rejected his message of monotheism and pelted him with stones, bloodying him? Islamic tradition has it that when Jibreel (Archangel Gabriel) sought his permission to punish the perpetrators, the Prophet (peace be upon him), instead prayed that

someday the inhabitants of Ta'if would leave their idols and worship Allah alone. Within a few years they did.

Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) servant once noted his forgiving disposition, said, "I served the Prophet (peace be upon him), for ten years, and he never said 'uf' (a word indicating impatience or discontent) to me and never blamed me by saying, 'Why did you do so or why didn't you do so?'"
(Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) archenemies hated his Message and hurled malicious insults at him, to which he responded with forbearance. Years later when he (peace be upon him) returned as victor to Makkah, his city of birth which he was forced to leave, he asked its awed citizens, "What do you think I'm going to do to you." They said, "You are a noble brother, son of a noble brother; we expect only good from you." The Prophet (peace be upon him) responded with a general amnesty.

Let Muslims not forget that the Prophet (peace be upon him), encouraged freedom of expression. In the Battle of Badr, he (peace be upon him) changed the battlefield against his own opinion due to the passionate advice of some young soldiers.

Part of the West's success today is the freedom of expression, of thought, of religion—that draws Muslims to it from their oppressed societies. For that, Muslims should be thankful to the West. After all, freedom is an Islamic value that the West has embraced while Muslim societies have forsaken.

Defending Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) requires allowing freedom and practicing compassion and forgiveness, like he did. In his lifetime he (peace be upon him), bore insults with magnanimity and devoted his time to spreading the Message of Allah. In fact, he never avenged anyone for a personal offence. Can we really respect him by violent retaliation?

Muslims should turn this extremely painful incident into something positive, by teaching the world what the Prophet (peace be upon him), means to us and what his life was like.

As for the West, there really is a need to reexamine the notion of free speech. Without safeguards, the exercise of this freedom can be lethal, as we have seen.

One may ask, is it morally defensible to provoke violence, cause death, and create a civilizational conflict for one cartoonist's freedom of expression?

The West already has laws to protect religious freedom, which Muslims and other peoples of faith admire. What it now needs to do is protect this freedom from being trampled by unbridled free speech. No one should have to insult Prophet Muhammad, Jesus, or Moses, may Allah exalt their mention to speak freely.

We can turn these negative, malicious cartoons into something positive by learning about the Prophet (peace be upon him), by following him, and educating others about his teachings.

Allah described the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the verse (which means): "And verily, you (O Muhammad) are on an exalted standard of character."
(Quran 68:4)

And (what means): "Indeed in the Messenger of Allah there is a good example to follow for him who hopes in (the meeting with) Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much."
(Quran 33:21)

By a divine decision, the status of Muhammad (peace be upon him) was raised forever, as in the verse (which means): "And (has Allah not) raised high your fame?" (Quran 94:4)

Muslims were commanded to lower their voices low in the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him), out of respect, as in the verse (which means): "O you who believe, raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him as you speak aloud to one another lest your deeds be rendered fruitless while you perceive not. Verily, those who lower their voices in the presence of Allah's Messenger, they are the ones whose hearts Allah has tested for piety. For them there is forgiveness and a great reward."
(Quran 49:2-3)

While other prophets were sent to their own people, Muhammad (peace be upon him) was appointed as the Messenger to all mankind. And such he was asked to declare (what means): "Say (O Muhammad): `O mankind, verily I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah - to Whom belongs the Dominion of the heavens and the earth."
(Quran 7:158)

On the Day of Judgement he (peace be upon him) will be the only Messenger to intercede with Allah to seek forgiveness for the wrongdoers.

As blasphemous as the drawings are, we believe that behind all events there is Allah's pre-decree and wisdom that mortal beings fully understand only in hindsight. In the end, this deeply hurtful incident would be seen as benefiting the image of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

A case in point is the verse (which means): "Verily, We have given you (O Muhammad) a manifest victory."
(Quran 48:1)

When this verse was revealed, even some of the most exemplary Muslims could not understand how being prevented from performing pilgrimage by the enemies could be a manifest victory. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had just signed a treaty with non-Muslims of Makkah that imposed unfair restrictions on Muslims.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) swore by Allah that no matter how restrictive this treaty seemed, it was a clear victory for Muslims. Within a few years, the victory became abundantly clear when Muslims marched into Makkah, not just as pilgrims but as victors.

Our love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) cannot be expressed except by following him. If we did that, we will see how Allah can change this painful incident into a great opportunity for the Islamic cause.