**PROPHET MUHAMMAD’S APPROACH TO PEACEFUL CO-EXISTANCE WITH NON-MUSLIMS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Prophet Muhammad peace and blessing of Allah be upon him was send as a mercy to the whole world(Qur’an 21:107) His life was a perfect example of being upright, merciful, compassionate, truthful, courageous, generous and ascetic in all worldly matters, while striving solely for the reward of the Hereafter. The prophet established an *Ummah* (community) in Medina which comprised not only Muslims alone but also Jews and Christians where they lived together bounded by a treaty of non-belligerence and mutual respect. This paper aims at discussing the approach of the Prophet (saw) towards peaceful coexistence with the non-Muslims. The research method employed included historical methods and also primary sources of the Shari’ah (i.e Qur’an and Sunnah). The finding of the paper is that the Prophet recognized Christians as one of the "People of the Book." Were he treated them with respect and kindness, contracted treaties with the various Christian tribes, and assured them the freedom to practice their faith and determine their own affairs while living under Islamic law. Finally the paper recommends among other things that if the prophet’s methods of dealing with the non-Muslims could be imitated by the Muslims they can live in harmony with the spirit of fraternity and cooperation with the non-Muslims.

**Introduction**

The general policy in Islam is to guarantee full rights to non- Muslim populations and therefore people subscribing to other religions were granted full civic rights by the virtue of the Quran and through the application of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Non- Muslim populations living within Muslim communities were granted peaceful and prosperous life through guaranteeing security for both their lives and properties and were given the appellation of "*ahl al-Dhimma*" which denotes those people with whom Muslims have an agreement or the responsibility of their personal safety and security of their property are undertaken by the Muslim state.

The basic guidelines which were laid by the Prophet in the early stage in Madinah where he established a city-state formed a blue print of how Muslims should deal with Christians and Jews among many other adherents to different religions. Granting minority rights to different religious groups through pledges, documents and mutual agreements succeeded in creating a healthy atmosphere for the development of both spiritual and material growth of the different religious groups living under the Islamic rule

In order to achieve and grant full rights for different religious minorities living in Madinah, the Prophet initiated a historical charter which was later known as "the Charter of the Madinah". By the virtue of this charter, preventive measures were in place to avoid blood feuds and crimes among different Arabian tribes composed of all creeds. The universality of the Islamic creed was meant for the totality of human beings and this necessitated fair treatment and full equality to those who chose not to subscribe to the Islamic view on life. Prophet Muhammad made a historical move of abolishing religious and social inequality.

A rapid glance at the relations of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) with the People of the Book during the first years of Islam, would reveal how he cooperated with Christians when Muslims were subjected to cruelty by the pagans in Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) directed them to migrate to Ethiopia, a place where Christians lived at that time. King Negus, the Christian ruler of that country, accepted the migrant Muslims and protected them against oppression.

**Good treatment for Non- Muslims**:

The most obvious facet of Prophet Muhammad’s attitude and behavior towards non-Muslims is the fact that he never compromised his moral virtues. As the Qur'an states, the Prophet always showed “the most beautiful morality” and presented humanity with the most beautiful example of this morality. He was referred to as “Trustworthy Muhammad” (Muhammad al-Amin) and acted this way toward all people, whether they were believers or not.

The teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) left an important principle, i.e. a Muslim treats all people well, as he (peace be upon him) said: “I have only been sent to perfect good characteristics” [Ahmad]. Noble manners are equal with every one; the Muslim and the non-Muslim. Coexistence, understanding, and co-operation among nations and people are greatly needed by humanity. So, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) ordered mercy in his message, and included every aspect of it as well as all forms of good treatment. The Noble Quran says: “Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just.” (Al- Mumtahanah: 60: 8)

This good treatment is confirmed in the case of family relations, and it becomes obligatory in the case of parental relationship. Hence, Asmaa’ the daughter of Abu Bakr mentions the following and says, “My mother came to visit me at the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and she was a disbeliever. So I consulted the Messenger of Allah, (Peace be upon him) and asked him, ‘My mother wants to visit me and expects me to treat her kindly; should I uphold the ties of kinship with my mother?’ He said, Yes, uphold the ties of kinship with your mother”. [Bukhari]

It has been narrated that, when the delegation of Najran, who were Christians, came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) in Medina, they entered his mosque in the afternoon, and it was the time for their prayer. So, they started to pray in his mosque and the Muslims wanted to stop them but the Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: ‘Let them pray’. So, they faced the east and prayed.” All of these examples indicate that Prophet Muhammad was benevolent towards all people, including those who had not embraced the message of Islam.

Anyone who learns about the prophetic message finds that it maintained human dignity and raised his status, as all human beings, whether Muslims or not, are the offspring of Adam. Allah the Almighty honored all humanity by saying, “We have honored the sons of Adam, provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of Our creation“. (Al-Israa, 17: 70) Hence, all people have rights as human beings before Allah the Almighty. Yet, they, before Allah, are distinguished by having piety, having faith, and adopting good morals. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was consistent in showing this clearly in his behavior and dealing with non-Muslims. In an authentic tradition, he, (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: “Whenever you see a funeral procession, stand up till the procession goes ahead of you” [Bukhari]**\***. One day a funeral procession passed in front of him and he stood up. When he was told that it was the coffin of a Jew, he said, “Is it not a living being (soul)?”(Bukhari)

Also, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) used to visit non-Muslims who were sick. Hence, the Prophet (peace be upon him) visited Abu Talib in his sickness, and he also visited a sick Jewish boy. [Bukhari] He (peace be upon him) observed people’s rights in terms of good neighborliness, as he said: “The best of companions with Allah is the one who is best to his companion, and the best of neighbors with Him is the one who is best to his neighbor” [Tirmidhi].The tradition included every neighbor, even if he was a non-Muslim. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not come to deprive those who did not follow him of freedom. Instead, he treated them with a rare form of tolerance. The following are some of the most important principles of Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) treatment of non-Muslims:

**The Basic Principles of the Prophet’s Relations with Non-Muslims**

1. **Freedom of religion and social values**

The Prophet guaranteed the freedom of religion of the non-Muslims who lived among the Muslims, and he put a great emphasis on these issues. Through granting religious freedom to different religious groups, the Prophet meant to set guidelines on how we should treat each other fairly which leads to the prevention of bloodshed and wars among nations. Although Islam is the seal of the previous messages and the prophet Muhammad is the final messenger of Allah he (peace be upon him) never tried to force any one to adopt Islam. The Noble Quran highlighted this meaning clearly by saying: **“There** **is no compulsion in religion** **as truth stands out** **clear from error...”.** (Al-Baqarah, 2: 256) Therefore, no one is forced to adopt Islam.

Islam not only gave non- Muslims freedom to retain their religion, but it also allowed them to practice their ceremonies and preserved their places of worship. The Prophet (peace be upon him) prevented his companions from disturbing Christian clergymen in their hermitages, and he never assaulted a non-Muslim place of worship. His companions, and the Caliphs after him, understood this meaning very well; so, they recommended their military leaders not to seize or demolish their places of worship. Also, Islam gave them the freedom to follow their laws related to marriage, divorce, and the like.

The values of justice with the other: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) ordered us to deal fairly with all people whether Muslims or non-Muslims. This is mentioned in the Noble Qur’an, “Allah does command you to render back your Trusts to those to whom they are due; and when you judge between man and man, that you judge with justice”. (An-Nisaa’, 4:58) The Prophet throughout his life had a tenacity of the purpose of establishing peace among nations through signing different pacts, and treaties to ensure peaceful coexistence and security to all people. This is proven through pacts like the Peace of Hudayibiyah and the Treaty of Taif.

Another famous example is the treaty of Najran which was delivered to Christians of Najran and it surrounding area. The document reads, " To the Christians of Najran and its surrounding territories, the security of God and the pledge of His Prophet is extended for their lives, religion and their property- to the present as well as the absent, and others besides, there shall be no interference within the practice of their faith or their observance nor any change in their rights and privileges, no bishop shall be removed from his bishopric, nor any priest from his priesthood, nor any monk from his monastery, and they shall continue to enjoy everything great and small as heretofore no image or cross hall be destroyed, they shall not oppress or be oppressed; they shall not practice the rights of blood-vengeance as in the Days of Ignorance, nor shall they be required to furnish provisions for the troops".

The treaty of Najran as discussed earlier, is an illuminating proof of how the prophet unreservedly conferred upon the Scripturalists not only social and religious freedom but also granted them the power to decide their own civil matters through establishing judicial autonomy which was not only pertinent to personal status but also covers civil, penal and all life affairs. Religious freedom and independent judicial system laid the foundation of a true confederacy which had a constitution through which different religious groups became an integral part of a political arrangement by means of a social contract.

Eradicating injustice and ill treatment to different social and religious groups was not meant as a bait to lure new converts into Islam but actually was meant to rectify the crooked way of looking and thinking of other human beings who do not happen to share the same social status or religious affiliation. Once some Chrisitan Fathers came to visit the Prophet in his mosque at Madinah to discuss the merits of a true religion, but during their stay they couldn't find a church to offer their prayers so the Prophet offered them his mosque to pray in it. On another occasion there was a delegation from the tribe of Thaqif visiting the Prophet so a tent was fixed up for them within the premises of the Prophet's mosque. When it was pointed that the visitors were polytheists, the Prophet said in reply that no one was such but he made himself one.

The pinnacle of religious tolerance and clemency was provided by the Prophet upon his victorious entry to Makkah after long years of suffering and persecution by the non- Muslim Makkans. The Prophet and his companion’s endured ridicule and scorn poured on them by the Makkans who had implacable hatred and enmity against Muslims. The long years of bitter, cruel and sustained persecution, all the fighting, the hardship and suffering and the loss of a lot of dear and devoted companions; all these were laid aside at the moment of triumph, banished from mind and forgiven in the name of the Lord. The clemency of the Prophet was unparalleled in the history of mankind for the accused were told that they were free. Giving a pledge to this effect, the Prophet informed the Makkans they were free and there was no reproof against them". The glorious act of unconditional forgiving has no similar act available on record. There occurred no retaliation, no dispossession, no enslavement, no execution, no looting and no kidnapping and dishonoring of women by the conquerors.

1. **Justice and equity**

Prophet Muhammad was keen to grant religious minority’s sufficient judicial autonomy which was a basic characteristic of the Islamic legal system. Prophet he, (peace be upon him) received the revelation and applied it in the greatest manner, as he was ordered to be just with all people without looking to their status, race, religion or ancestry. They were all equal, even if the person who had a certain right was unfair to the Muslims; he would still be given his right. The Noble Quran ordered the Messenger (peace be upon him) to rule fairly if Ahl al Kitab (i.e. the Jews and the Christians) choose him as an arbitrator, “If you judge, judge in equity between them.”(Al-Maida, 5: 42). In more than thirty traditions, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the right of al-Mu’ahad (the one who has a covenant with the Muslims), among which is the following: “Whoever killed a person having a treaty with the Muslims, shall not smell the smell of Paradise though its smell is perceived from a distance of forty years” [Bukhari].

He was also reported to have said, “Beware, if anyone wrongs a contracting man, or diminishes his right or forces him to work beyond his capacity, or takes from him anything without his consent, I shall plead for him (the victimized) on the Day of Judgment [Abu Dawud].

The prophet (peace be upon him) prohibited torturing anyone, even if he did no adopt Islam. Therefore, he (peace be upon him) forbade torturing any human being whether Muslim or non-Muslim. He stated, “Allah the Almighty tortures those who torture people in this life” [Muslim].

The Prophet continuously warned the Muslims to treat the non-Muslims using positive behavior and attitudes. For instance, addressing Muaz, whom he had sent to Yemen as a governor, a place that was largely inhabited by the People of the Book at that time, he said: “Avoid being cursed by the aggrieved, because there is no barrier between their curse and that of Allah” ((Bukhari, Zakat 41, 63, Magazi 60)

**c.) Patience**

The Prophet showed endless patience in the course of conveying the message of Islam to the non-Muslims. He never tired of speaking to people and sharing with them the monotheistic belief which is the essence of the religion. He was always sincere in his relationships and he abstained from useless polemics or quarrels. As is stated in the Holy Qur'an, the Prophet always treated people well; he used kind words and avoided rude and aggressive behavior.

As a matter of fact, despite the rude behavior of some of the communities he encountered while spreading the religion, the Prophet controlled his anger and asked Allah for salvation for them. In the same vein when he (peace be upon him) went to Tā’if with Zayd ibn Haritha in search of a freer environment in which to convey the message of Islam due to the increasing pressure in Mecca, the leading figures in Tā’if treated him rudely and ordered the people to stone him and drive him out of the city. In response to this sad experience, Prophet Muhammad prayed that the people of Tā'if would be granted deliverance.

It was due to his kind and forgiving attitude that the people did not refuse to listen to his message; rather, they considered it and decided to accept Islam, despite their initial opposition. It was due to his kind and forgiving attitude that the people did not refuse to listen to his message; rather, they considered it and decided to accept Islam, despite their initial opposition.

**d) Constructiveness**

Prophet Muhammad never coerced people when communicating Islam to them. He never forced them to accept the messages he was conveying in line with the principle, “There is no compulsion in religion” (Al-Baqarah:256). Rather, he was always constructive in his relationships with people, whether they were believers or not. In particular, he maintained good relations, particularly in the Medinan period, with the Jewish tribes and the Arab polytheists with whom he lived as long as they did not show hostility towards the Muslims and did not violate any mutual treaties. Prophet Muhammad saw no harm in different communities living together, with each community contributing something useful to society. For instance, Muslims and non-Muslims were able to live together in peace in Medina under the agreement known as “The Medina Document”, as discussed earlier, which was signed by the different groups living there in the early Medinan period. The different communities undertook common responsibilities to form a society; this situation could continue as long as the provisions of the agreement were not violated. The Prophet even worked with some Arab polytheists who had been prisoners of war. For instance, after the Battle of Badr, the Muslims benefited from the ability to read and write that some of the idolaters and prisoners had: in return for their release, they taught the Muslims how to read and write.( Haykal, The life f Muhammad;

**e) Respect for Basic Rights and Freedoms**

The Prophet (peace be upon him) focused on the humanity of the people he addressed, rather than on their differences in faith, ideas and lifestyles. In other words, he behaved in line with the idea that the people around him were human and possessed a life and soul. He did not based his actions on whether they were Muslim or not. For instance, in Medina the Prophet stood up before a passing funeral procession. His companions said to him: “O Prophet, that man was not a Muslim.” In response to this, the Prophet emphasized the quality of being human, a common feature that all people share, with the following words: “Did he not have a soul?”(Bukhari; kitabul janaza)

Islam gives great importance to the protection of basic values in the religion. As a matter of fact, the protection of life corresponds to the basic right to live, the protection of religion corresponds to the freedom of belief, the protection of the mind corresponds to the freedom of faith, the protection of property corresponds to the freedom to be able to earn capital and property, the protection of the generations corresponds to the freedom to have a family. These constitute the fundamental rights that humans have according to Islam. These rules apply not only to Muslims, but to all human beings. Accordingly, Prophet Muhammad protected these basic rights in the society in which he lived, whether the people were Muslim or not. He made clear the approach that must be taken towards those non-Muslims who agreed to live in an Islamic state with the following words: “He who torments non-Muslims torments the Messenger of Allah. Accordingly, he who torments the Messenger of Allah torments Allah.”

**f) Invitation to Allah and the Truth**

The most important mission of the Prophet was to convey the book of Allah to the people, to warn them and to invite them to Allah and the truth.(Surah 33; 45-46) In this context, the Prophet acted as a fore- warner and reminder for everyone. There were times when people debated, argued and even struggled against him. However, he always maintained his principled attitude with patience and perseverance. For example, when the Christians of Najran and some other non-Muslim groups came to debate him and even to test his Prophet hood, Prophet Muhammad debated them for days, explaining Islam to them. Although they strongly opposed and challenged him, the Prophet never resorted to violence or anger; he responded to them with calm reliance and commitment to Allah. When the non-Muslim guests of the Prophet and the Muslims requested a place to worship, he did not hesitate to invite them to pray in the Al-Masjid al-Nabawi, one of the most sacred locations in Islam.

Prophet Muhammad( peace be upon him) never refused those who wanted to meet, speak or debate him; this attitude led many people to accept Islam. In the revelations imparted in Mecca related to the attitudes to be adopted towards non-Muslims (for instance, Al-Ankabut 46-47), it is commanded that Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims behave kindly towards the People of the Book and that the commonalities between them be emphasized.

**g) Ruling with Justice and equity**

Prophet Muhammad was always an unbiased arbitrator and leader who acted justly to defend the middle ground. His ability to arbitrate was recognized not only by the Muslims, but also by the non-Muslims. Probably for this reason, the non-Muslims asked him to arbitrate in the conflicts that occurred with the Muslims from time to time and in the problems they had amongst themselves. For some of the legal problems that occurred among the Jews, the Prophet ruled according to Jewish law. His commitment to justice and his reliable character were well-known long before he became a prophet. For example, he arbitrated in a disagreement among the Quraishis in Mecca regarding who should replace the al-Hajar al-Aswad (the Black Stone, considered holy even before the advent of Islam, as it is said to have descended from heaven) in the walls of the Ka'ba after renovations had been completed on the building. By finding a way for the tribes to cooperate equally in the task, he prevented a tense situation from escalating into war.

In daily life, Prophet Muhammad continued to have socio-economic relations with the non-Muslims; from time to time he gave and took loans from non-Muslims. There is a very interesting account of how the Prophet pawned his armor to a non-Muslim in return for a sum of money. According to Aisha, the Prophet passed away while his armor was still in pawn to a Jew5 Also, within the scope of the good relationships he had established with other people, the Prophet always accepted invitations from non-Muslims and listened to them. In fact, once he accepted an invitation from a Jewish man who then tried to assassinate him.

**h) Guarding the Cultural Differences**

Although Prophet Muhammad guarded the basic rights and laws of the non-Muslims in terms of human relations, he always took care to be different from them in terms of culture and tradition. He emphasized that Muslims should take care not to resemble non-Muslims in their traditions or the way they cut or wore their hair and beards. In many of his speeches, the Prophet warned the Muslims about these points. For example, he was reported to have said, “Jews and Christians never dye their hair. You should not act as they do.” in the same vein when the issue of how to call the people to prayer came up, the Prophet did not approve of the idea of using horns or bells since these practices would resemble those of the Jews and Christians.

In his attitudes towards non-Muslims, Prophet Muhammad never exhibited a collective approach that placed everybody on the same level; he always was aware that people have different strengths. It is significant that in the Meccan period as mentioned earlier, he sent some Muslims who were overburdened by the oppression of the idolaters to Abyssinia, the state of the Christian ruler who was known for his justice, and said; “… That place is a land of truth. Stay there until Allah saves you from your predicament.” On the other hand, it is known that the non-Muslims, polytheists and the People of the Book occasionally were violent, hateful and hostile to the Prophet and the Muslims and their envy and jealousy of them was evident. The Holy Qur'an explicitly mentions the attitudes of the non-Muslims towards the Muslims, in particular those of the Jews and Christians who are considered the People of the Book. In the revelations imparted in Mecca related to the attitudes to be adopted towards non-Muslims (for instance, Al-Ankabut 46-47), were it is commanded that Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims behave kindly towards the People of the Book and that the commonalities between them be emphasized.

These expectations continued for a while, even after the emigration of the Muslims to Medina. The Treaty of Medina, guaranteeing the coexistence of the various groups living in Medina with respect for each other’s’ presence and faith, was one of the first actions undertaken by Prophet Muhammad after arriving in Medina; this treaty also included the Jews and those who made treaties with them. Article 16 of this treaty guaranteed that the Jews who were the subjects of the Muslims according to the treaty would be allowed to continue their lives “without tyranny and without aid to their enemies.” Articles 18, 24, 37 and 45 specify the liabilities of those who signed the treaty in relation to issues of mutual defense and expenditures, whereas in Articles 23, 36 and 42 it is emphasized that Prophet Muhammad was the sole authority on the text of the treaty and the authority to be referred to in times of conflict. However this treaty did not last long and the Jewish tribes that had signed it violated the agreement one at a time.

Naturally, some conflicts occurred between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. The Prophet always told the Muslims to protect the innocent people, even when these conflicts turned into fights or battles. By doing this, the Prophet ensured that no harm would come to those who did not participate in the battle, such as the elderly, women and children and those who had sought shelter in their homes or places of worship

What Prophet Muhammad achieved was not less than opening a new chapter of tolerance and justice in world history. Establishing an independent judiciary system free from external influences guaranteed the protection of the interests of the citizens and securing justice for all regardless of their color or creed. The scrupulous observation and literal adherence of the Muslims to the terms of the pacts, treaties, alliances and agreements with non-Muslims was a foundational step into establishing an effective system of international law.

By setting clear rules for war engagements and prohibiting Muslims soldiers from excesses in war fares, Prophet Muhammad left indelible imprint on the annals of humanity. In his endeavor to establish rules of justice and freedom for different religious groups, Prophet Muhammad emphasized in different occasions that "whoever oppresses a dhimmi, shall find me to be their advocate on the Day of Judgment (against the oppressing Muslim)". The Prophet also warned the Muslims against abusing Dhimmis as he stated "Remember, one who is unjust to a dhimmi, breaks his word with him, overburdens him or dispossesses him, I shall plead against him on the Day of Judgment".

These rules apply not only to Muslims, but to all human beings. Accordingly, Prophet Muhammad protected these basic rights in the society in which he lived, whether the people were Muslim or not. He made clear the approach that must be taken towards those non-Muslims who agreed to live in an Islamic state with the following words: “He who torments non-Muslims torments the Messenger of Allah. Accordingly, he who torments the Messenger of Allah torments Allah.”

**Conclusion**

In the foregoing discussions we have examine how Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) leaved and treated the non-Muslims with respect and kindness, contracted treaties with the various Christian tribes, and assured them the freedom to practice their faith and determine their own affairs while living under Islamic law devoid of any molestation and harassment. This could be the reasons why some hitherto avowed enemies of the Prophet and Islam later embraced Islam due to the Prophets Magnanimity and sagacity.

Finally the paper recommends among other things that if the prophet’s methods of dealing with the non-Muslims could be imitated by the Muslims they can live in harmony with the spirit of fraternity and cooperation with the non-Muslims.

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