

FROM THE MINBAR

MUHAMMAD (S): THE SUPERBLY HUMAN & SOCIAL PROPHET

Khutbah delivered by Imam Dr. Zijad Delic at SNMC on February 3th, 2012 corresponding to Rabi'ul Awwal 11th, 1433 H.

BACKGROUND

Indeed all praise is for God, Lord of the worlds. Peace and blessings of God be upon Muhammad (S), his family, Khulafai Rashidin, all his Companions, and all those who follow in their footsteps until the Last Day. All praise is for God! We praise Him. We seek His help and ask for His forgiveness. We seek God's refuge from evils of ourselves and from our evil actions. I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except God, alone, having no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad (S) is His Messenger.

My dear brothers and sisters in Islam ~ As Salamun 'Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuhu.

INTRODUCTION: PAST MATTERS

The Faithful have always scrutinized the past looking for spiritual lessons from great people that speak directly to the contemporary conditions of their own lives. More than ever, we are in need of such inspiration today; more than ever we need to tell these stories.

Now, there are people who believe that we should study history only to stay safe and secure, doing only what won't get us into trouble. They will often quote Sir Winston Churchill in saying that, "Those that fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it."

But I say that some parts of our history deserve to be both preserved and repeated; you should not throw away all of history because some of it does not bear revisiting. In the context of the man about whom I will speak today, there is a great deal of justification to state the opposite of Churchill's rather pessimistic judgement against history.

In speaking of Prophet (S) and his life, we might well say, that history should indeed be studied so that we may be blessed to repeat at least selective parts of it.

Do not think that I am arguing for intellectual escapism or that I'm suggesting to Muslims or anyone else that we live in parts of the past that make us feel good. On the contrary, Muslims do not have to walk in their own protective shadows (using German philosopher Gadamer's approach to an excessive dependence on history). Instead, I see selective repetition as a means of living with the past rather than living in it).

A TIMELESS STORY

In this vein of enlightened repetition I want to share with all of you my narrative – a timeless story – about the very human and social prophet – Muhammad (S) – the Messenger of God who was sent to be a source of goodness and compassion in the world. I want to tell you my story, by myself, as I have come to understand and believe it.

First of all Muhammad's (S) story is simple but timeless – it has a place not only in history but beyond it!

"My" Prophet is humble and generous, kind and forgiving, pragmatic and forward-looking; he is an optimist (mutafa'il) not a pessimist (mutashaim), a compassionate and loving personality. In short Muhammad (S) represents the kind of role model one can only wish for at a time when the world seems filled with so many false and deceptive "role-models" who compete for our respect and admiration.



But Muhammad (S) is the "real thing" – a genuine Prophet of Peace! His life was a total "jihad of peace" and "jihad for peace." He worked literally by the sweat of his brow to bring peace and justice to the war-torn Arabia of his time. To this noble purpose his life was focused on a tireless campaign against ignorance, greed, injustice and arrogance.

POWERFUL MESSAGE

His Message was powerful and enduring! It emerged in a troubled time as being clear and substantial, immediate, yet eternal. Muhammad's (S) message was a call for massive moral revolution – like giving a moral vaccination to an entire society that was suffering from the infection of evil and despair.

The Prophet's (S) guidance revealed a divine constitution that cares about ALL of creation. So great were its implications that they redefined body, mind, law, government – the very essence of reality for all humanity... His message was holy and wholistic, embracing everything in our personal and collective realms of being.

THE PROPHET OF BOTH WORLDS

Muhammad (S) was the Prophet who, like no other, embraced the present world and its reality, while understanding and teaching about the next. He did not forsake the challenges of living in the here-and-now in order to achieve the Hereafter!

In other words, for him our physical and material world could not be only a veil of tears or a sanctuary of prayer, but rather a rich garden of opportunities where we sow good seeds for the next world! Indeed, it is a place of challenges, some of them difficult, but above all, the Prophet (S) taught me to be a good gardener in this world. Here, I am not only blessed with the success of my present efforts but know that a rich harvest also awaits. Talk to any passionate gardener and you will quickly learn that he or she enjoys the preparation, cultivation, and even weeding, as much as the season of blooming or ripening. In the same way, Prophet Muhammad (S) taught me that while we are here living on earth, we are continuously invited to enjoy life as a beautiful garden, even while working hard to cultivate it in the best way we can.

One of the features that distinguishes Muhammad (S) from other leaders is the way he balanced spirituality and worldly life – or, religious and secular; prayer and entertainment. (the story of Khandala r.a).

His understanding of equilibrium was so complete that even those who do not follow his religious intellectual heritage have noticed this unique elegance of his character.

In a book "The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History" author Michael Hart places Muhammad (S) as #1 and explains:

"My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.

"It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history."

Thus, I take him (S) as my role model in both spheres: Spiritual as well as secular, theoretical and practical; and I try to balance my life as he (S) did.

Since we often speak more about the spiritual or religious aspect of Islam than of its social aspects, let me share with you the other side of the coin – the story of how Muhammad (S) was also an influential social Prophet. Perhaps I might seem biased -- but who is not when we come to talk of those whom we hold dear in our hearts? Yes, I may be biased, yet at the same time I am seeking to be both honest and objective – honest, because I want to share only the truth with you; objective, because I know that's exactly what he did in all his worldly dealings.

Muhammad's (S) life is fairly well recorded and we possess more historical knowledge about it than of many other religious figures. Even before he was called to invite people to the Truth and was given the revelation of Divine guidance in the words of the Holy Qur'an, he was well known in his society as someone of high ethical qualities – he was *Al Ameen*, or trustworthy. In his day he functioned as a trusted holder of securities, or a kind of personal banker; people willingly trusted him to safeguard with the most valuable items they possessed.

Auguste Comte, a French thinker and philosopher who was quite hard on Muhammad, changed his attitude once he acquired more authentic information about him, and humbly said: "Forgive me, O Muhammad! You are greater than man and yet still you are a man, with more perfection! Where we could find that perfection?"

THE PROPHET OF EASE

As both prophet and human, Muhammad (S) lived and taught Islam as a life of ease! Now this clearly needs some explanation; that is, a truthful application, or praxis... "Ease" is not always "easy"!

For example, he was a discreet and discerning preacher who knew that honey is more effective than vinegar, for people are often soothed into deep learning instead of scolded towards it.

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He won his followers' hearts with flexibility and empathy. As we already know, the concept of forced conversion is alien to the core of Islam and to Muhammad's (S) teachings. He knew, as an experienced and compassionate professional, that rigidity is counter-intuitive: you cannot force somebody to believe, for when people are externally forced or compelled, how can you even call the resulting compliance "belief"?

Belief is a conscious choice; it comes from deep within, from one's heart, and nowhere else. So Muhammad refused to make Islam a hard and complex path.

In the same vein he was meticulously devoted to God, but never the obsessive fanatic: "Woe to those who exaggerate, who are excessive, who make things hard, who are rigid and too strict," he warned, cautioning those who tended toward extremes in any aspect of belief or tradition.

He was also a man of moderation, telling his followers at one point: "Moderation! Enlightened Moderation! The best of all dealings are those done in moderation! It's God's intent for the community." (the *Ummatan Wasata* – His Sunnah).

Muhammad (S) also knew that maintaining balance (or *Mizan*) is the greatest spiritual challenge we humans have: we strive to achieve it in personal life; in family, work, feelings, friendship, love, etc. In the 21st century, we strive the same way to find balance in how we use our iPhones, our e-mail, our social networking sites. In considering the use of electronic devices alone, to what degree have we become their slaves? How can we regain our balance in using them productively?

Here, the example of Abdullah ibn 'Amr (r.a.) comes to mind: "Have I heard it [correctly] that you fast during the day and pray during nights? ...Your Creator has [a] right over you, your family ... your body ... so give to each of them their right."

QUALIFY YOURSELF!

Muhammad (S) urged us to qualify ourselves as human beings! ...and to do so, one has to start by qualifying himself/herself.

What does this really mean? He cared about himself, but was not selfish; for only through enlightened self-care can we remain able to care about others. We cannot give what we do not have! In that way he was always prepared to be selfless towards others!

He was the man who cared deeply about his family and ordered us to be as kind to our own. It is often quoted from his teachings that the best among the believers are those who are the best in practicing ethics; in turn, they are also the best at caring for their families (one's wife).

Muhammad (S) was also somewhat ahead of his time in urging parents and adults to be caring and responsible towards children. In an age when infant mortality was high and emotional investment was therefore frequently painful, and when surviving children were often regarded simply as miniature adults or half-sized working units, Muhammad taught a radical reversal of attitude.

He counseled believers to be gentle to children, to guide their ethics, to treat them as gifts from God, to bless them with the rightful joys and pleasures of childhood. Being responsible towards one's children also meant – then and now -- not blaming schools, society, or even the neighbor's offspring for problems in your own family. Parents must be proactive.

There is a story about a *badu* who visited Muhammad's (S) home and found him playing with his grandchildren. The *badu* was uncomfortable with this display of affection and happiness it and asked: "You play and kiss your kids; we do not do that..." And the Prophet answered sadly; "What can I do

when there is no place for mercy in your heart ...you are a lost cause."

Muhammad (S) also taught respect towards parents - especially mothers.

And he asked us to love and care for one another as we would like them to love and care for ourselves (perhaps the most famous of the one of the "golden rules" in any faith!).

Muhammad (S) was respectful of others beyond his own family and friends and regarded all of humanity as brothers and sisters, again expressing a radical and countercultural generosity of spirit during a period of intense tribal affiliations.

Jabir bin 'Abdullah narrated this example: "A funeral procession passed in front of us and the Prophet (S) stood up and we too stood up ... We said, 'O Allah's Apostle! This is the funeral procession of a Jew.'" He said, "Whenever you see a funeral procession, you should stand up." (Bukhari)

The Prophet (S) stood up as a mark of respect for the funeral of a Jew because non-Muslims are human beings equally worthy of our respect.

Similarly, he taught us to be kind and caring toward our neighbors, for they are often there to help and support us more than even our own family members.

This is an increasingly important teaching to reclaim and enact, for today, it seems there are too many "cold-relationships." One of paradoxes of our time is that we have made such great technological advances that we will soon be able to take vacations to other planets, yet we still have a problem crossing the street to simply say "hello" to a new neighbor. And we often pass by others as if they were total strangers. Muhammad (S) greeted and engaged with friend and stranger alike.

He was also a leader who strove to achieve peace and justice for ALL humans. He practiced a true "Culture of Peace." As George Bernard Shaw wrote:

"I believe that if a man like [Muhammad] were to assume the dictatorship (he meant leadership) of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it much needed peace and happiness." (The Genuine Islam, Singapore, Vol. 1, No. 8, 1936)

In this context, Muhammad (S) encouraged and welcomed the expression of local cultural practices within the rituals and celebrations of Islam, even the tradition of singing at weddings, which some do not permit on the pretext that Islam forbids it.

The Prophet (S) regarded such cultural expressions as "enrichment." And that is why I believe that Islam has been able to establish itself in so many diverse communities and societies around the world.

Muhammad (S) upheld justice as being among the greatest social values good leaders could give to their subjects. He praised the high ethics and justice of Abyssinia's King Negus, a Christian whose example of justice was a model of his time.

It perhaps goes without saying that Muhammad (S) was a committed citizen who faithfully contributed to the society he lived in, and urged all members of any community to do likewise. He considered such participation for the collective good a form of social contract; in his eyes, betrayal of that contract was a treacherous act of hypocrisy.

In fact, he deeply loved his place of residence and considered all citizens of his adopted city of Madinah as one *Ummah* (or community of people). He remained steadfastly loyal to his city and considered such loyalty not just one's social obligation, but a religious one as well.

The many examples I have related from Prophet Muhammad's (S) life offer clear signs to us as Canadian Muslims that any positive attributes and

aspirations in Canada -- such as freedom, equality, justice, social cohesion and the like -- are in their essence deeply rooted in Islamic teaching and logic.

THE MAN OF PRINCIPLES

He was always a man of principles and here are a few that relate very deeply to our present circumstances as Canadian Muslims:

1. Start from the possible – whenever we start from the possible, we open up opportunities to accomplish even what we thought might be impossible; if we start from the impossible, however, we may never even achieve the possibilities within our reach. Why complicate when can be made easier?
2. The power of Peace is much stronger than the power of violence. During times of strength and power, Muhammad was forgiving and generous... In times of weakness and seemingly without power, he was the same... He taught that justice, "even if it is against yourselves or your dear ones...is close to righteousness."
3. Make a friend out of even your worst enemy; repel evil with what is good. When you do so, even your worst enemy may realize it and become a friend.
4. Be pragmatic in controversial matters. Muhammad debated with all and gave all space in which to express their views and concerns ...

CONCLUSION: THE MAN OF ETHICS

My personal narrative about Muhammad (S) is a sincere reflection about the unique human teacher and prophet of Islam who is so greatly loved by some and so tragically misunderstood by others.

It's about a man who served humanity diligently – so much so that when he was once urged to curse his opponents, said: "I was not sent to curse others. I was sent as a mercy to ALL."

He was the man of true *ethical* correctness – not the characterless *political* correctness that has become today's norm. No; my Muhammad was a model of service – a genuine servant/leader and a timeless inspiration to humanity – a *superbly human and social Prophet*.

Allahumma Amin.

AN ACTION ITEM

If YOU like this Khutbah and what we, at your SNMC, do, PLEASE:

Support our activities & projects

Please Donate ONE Prayer Spot for \$2,500 and be the ONE who will build the Masjid and the Center so that it could help us and our children maintain Islamic Identity and build strong Canadian National Identity, Insha Allah.



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