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The Life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as Mercy in the Eyes of Non-Believers: A Qur'anic and Prophetic Perspective

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Abstract

Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is universally recognized in the Qur'an as Rahmatul-lil-'Alamin—a Mercy for all the worlds (Qur'an 21:107). His life, often misrepresented by critics, offers profound lessons of justice, compassion, and forgiveness not only for Muslims but also for non-believers. This paper critically examines the Prophetic model of mercy in various dimensions—spiritual, social, political, and economic—through Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and historical analysis. It discusses his exemplary patience during persecution in Makah, his pluralistic governance in Madinah, and his magnanimity in times of conflict such as the Conquest of Makkah. The Prophet's dealings with non-Muslims highlight universal ethics, emphasizing human dignity, rights of minorities, and justice for all. Moreover, the testimonies of Western historians and scholars such as Lamartine, Karen Armstrong, and Montgomery Watt affirm that even beyond the boundaries of faith, Muhammad (PBUH) was perceived as a symbol of mercy. In contemporary times marked by Islam phobia



and interfaith tensions, the Prophet's life provides a timeless framework for peace building, tolerance, and global harmony.

Keywords: Prophet Muhammad, Mercy, Non-Believers, Qur'an, Hadith, Interfaith Dialogue, Peace building

Introduction

The Qur'an declares, "And we have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds" (Qur'an, 21:107). This verse forms the foundation of the Islamic understanding of the Prophet's mission. Mercy (rahmah) in Islam transcends compassion towards Muslims alone; it encompasses justice, tolerance, and universal welfare. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) exemplified these principles throughout his life. His mercy was not conditional on acceptance of Islam, but extended to those who opposed him, fought against him, or belonged to other faiths.

This paper examines his life through the lens of mercy as seen by non-believers, drawing upon Qur'anic injunctions, Hadith literature, and historical events. The discussion highlights his patience under persecution, pluralistic governance, ethical conduct in war, and compassion in daily social and economic dealings.

Mercy as a Core Prophetic Trait

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) described himself, "I am but a mercy bestowed" (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2319). His conduct reflected patience, forgiveness, and compassion even under hostility. The Qur'an commanded him: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best" (Qur'an, 16:125).

His mercy was not passive but transformative—it reshaped social norms, challenged injustice, and established equality. Unlike the norms of tribal Arabia, where vengeance was the rule, the Prophet



emphasized forgiveness: “Repel evil with that which is better” (Qur’an, 41:34).

Mercy towards Non-Believers in Makkah

The Prophet’s early mission in Makkah was marked by opposition and persecution. Despite mockery, physical assaults, and economic boycotts, he never responded with vengeance. His journey to Ta’if, where he was brutally attacked, illustrates his patience: instead of invoking punishment, he prayed for their guidance.

His response highlights mercy as a prophetic constant. The Qur’an assures: “Good and evil are not equal. Repel [evil] by that which is better, and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity will become as though he was a devoted friend” (Qur’an, 41:34).

Mercy in Madinah Society

Upon migration to Madinah, the Prophet became both a spiritual and political leader. He authored the Charter of Madinah, which guaranteed rights and security to Muslims, Jews, and other groups. It remains one of the earliest examples of constitutional pluralism.

The Qur’an reinforces this principle: “Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes—from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly” (Qur’an, 60:8).

This model of coexistence reveals his inclusive vision of mercy, wherein non-Muslims were full participants in society.

Mercy in Conflict and War

Contrary to the norms of warfare in his time, the Prophet established ethical rules that humanized conflict. Women, children, the elderly,



and non-combatants were protected. Crops, trees, and places of worship were not to be destroyed (Abu Dawood, Hadith 2613).

The Conquest of Makkah stands as the greatest example. After decades of hostility, the Prophet granted general amnesty to the Quraysh. Instead of revenge, he declared: “No blame will there be upon you today. Go, for you are free.” This act of forgiveness astonished even his enemies and turned many into allies.

Mercy in Social and Economic Dealings

The Prophet’s reforms extended beyond religious teachings to social and economic justice. He condemned exploitation, promoted fairness in trade, and emphasized care for orphans, widows, and the poor. His compassion was evident in dealings with both Muslims and non-Muslims.

For example, when a Jewish neighbor repeatedly insulted him, the Prophet continued to show kindness, visiting him in illness. Such acts reflected not only tolerance but proactive compassion.

Non-Believers’ Recognition of Prophetic Mercy

The life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been admired by several Western historians. French historian Alphonse de Lamartine described him as a “philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas.” His acknowledgment of the Prophet’s moral greatness highlights recognition beyond faith boundaries.

Karen Armstrong emphasized Muhammad’s (PBUH) role in promoting justice and equality, stating that he sought not domination but the dignity of all human beings. Similarly, Montgomery Watt praised his forgiveness as the key to his success, observing that his ability to reconcile enemies was central to his mission.



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These accounts demonstrate that non-Muslims, despite differing worldviews, recognize his embodiment of mercy.

Contemporary Relevance

In today's climate of global conflict, Islam phobia, and interfaith mistrust, the Prophet's legacy holds timeless relevance. His approach to mercy—through forgiveness, justice, and compassion—offers guidance for peace building.

For Muslims, adopting his example means promoting interfaith dialogue and rejecting extremism. For non-Muslims, his life stands as evidence that Islam, at its core, champions mercy and human dignity.

Conclusion

Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life was a mercy not confined to Muslims but extended universally, including to non-believers. His patience in Makkah, inclusivity in Madinah, ethics in warfare, and compassion in society reveal an unparalleled model of mercy. Historical testimonies from Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike affirm his greatness.

In a world struggling with division and hostility, the Prophetic example is essential for building justice, compassion, and peace. His life continues to inspire across cultures and faiths, validating the Qur'anic declaration that he is indeed "a mercy to the worlds."

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