

Media: A Platform to rejuvenate World Peace

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Abstract

Peace is a state of balance and understanding of one's own self and between others, where self respect is gained by the acceptance of differences, practice of tolerance, and resolution of conflicts through dialogue. This is commonly understood as the absence of hostility or the existence of healthy or newly healed interpersonal or international relationships, safety in matters of social or economic welfare, the acknowledgment of equality and fairness in political relationships and, in world matters.

The word communication is derived from the Latin root *communicare*. The Roman Empire devised what might be described as a mail or postal system, in order to centralize control of the empire from Rome. More advanced postal systems later appeared in the Islamic Caliphate and the Mughal Empire during the Middle Ages. The original means of mass communication were print magazines, journals, and newspapers collectively known as publications. Radio and television were then added. Needing a term to encompass them all, the term media was taken from the advertising people and has been used ever since. Internet has now joined the mix.

In the present world, the media is an entity of its own; its magnitude and presence has shaped the course of information flow while playing a pivotal role in political, economic, socio-cultural and religious processes. Information technology is at the essence of globalization with the ability to transcend and transform cross boundary interactions with resulting assimilation. In this regard, it would not be an overstatement to claim that the Global Media is perhaps the single most powerful tool known to human history.

With its role comes greater responsibility. Although the positive impacts of the media have outweighed the negatives, nonetheless, it is those negatives that have created distorted perceptions and perversions of the truth. Free, independent, objective media make people think, reflect and meet in an atmosphere of openness. In a democratic world, credibility, utility and purpose of media are to import justice to the people and safeguard the rights and liberty of the people with integrity and steadfastness. Media can do miracles by fostering global security, addressing international arm trades, balance of power, and nuclear weapons.

The time has come, where it is absolutely vital that global forces such as the Media and Internet disseminate knowledge, in terms of Religion, Faith and other components which in present scenario is contributing to negation, diverging from peace progression. This should be done in an objective and thorough manner by providing all the perspectives of any given Religion or Faith. As a result the media's pervasive and positive influence on life can be harnessed and made to strengthen peace building processes, and peaceful coexistence of the wider humanity.

Moving further, it is worth noting that some trends have emerged and will dominate culture, society and politics in the near future, which is the resurgence and persistence of religion as a national, regional and global force. Seemingly contradicting the long-held prediction that it would fade from modern life, religion has instead gained new profile and prominence on the global stage. Discussions will evolve with the universal teaching of all religions specifically those enjoined in Islam by Prophet Mohammad SAW, who has been recognized worldwide by Muslims and Non-Muslims as a Promoter of peace and social justice. Our Creator has sent Him as a Blessing for the whole universe (Rahmatallil Al-Amin), not for the Muslims alone. His teachings on peace making are shining examples for any and all.

This paper will expand on the question, what are the institutions and norms that would be the fabric of media in constituting world peace. Reporting philosophy of moderation over sensationalism, reason over action and temperate voices instead of radical ones are of essence. The core is to develop self-accountability of the media by defining and justifying its own ethical values; Values which are founded on the spirit of nurturing and saving humanity without diverging from the actuality of the rules of the universe. The paper will reflect on the adoption by the media - the noble attributes of Prophet Mohammad SAW towards peace - to gain universal acceptance of its efforts in fostering Global peace.

Keywords: Prophet Mohammad SAW, Media, Religion, Peace,

Introduction

Peace starts its venture through communication within the different stakeholders of a society in a particular social setting and is, responsible for influencing an individual's psycho-social and interpersonal state. It is worth noting that the religion of Islam, contrary to popular notions, has specific injunctions on human interactions, which encompasses tolerance and acceptance of other faiths and peaceful cohabitation. The Holy Quran states '*O Mankind, we have created you male and female, and have made you races and tribes, that you may know one another*' (Al Quran 49:13).

Media is the prime medium to inform us of the world around through it's job of transferring information and images to other's creating a global communication hub and promoting independent thinking process and freedom of speech.

The Global Media is an entity of its own; its magnitude and presence has shaped the course of information dissemination whilst also playing a crucial role in the political, economic, social, religious, and cultural processes of globalization. Information technology is at the essence and centrality of globalization and its ability to transcend and transform cross boundary interactions and assimilation. In this regard, it would not be an overstatement to make the claim that the Global Media is perhaps the most powerful tool to incorporate and promote peace throughout human history.

The Contemporary Role of Media

The simple truth about human psychology is that what they know largely determines what they see, hear, feel, and how they think and act upon these senses. The way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what human beings will do and what will be its impact on psycho-social tranquility of that state.

In the developed countries, nearly all of what any one person knows about the values, spiritualities and religious beliefs of others comes from the media. When values differ interculturally, the issue arises of the extent to which media behaviour should be modified in the light of the values of specific cultures. This calls for a better representation of the diversity of cultures and faiths in both the staff and the content of the media.

In the 1990s the super powers and the developed countries appear to dominate the world. They do so through the media. That is why the media is seen as hostile by the Muslim world. Anything from them is regarded as potentially threatening; this creates obsession and mistrust. It is the gut reaction and bizarre response of a people repeatedly humiliated and led down by the powerful. It is not the response of Islamic civilization which has survived over a millennium and produced some of the most enduring cultural systems ever seen. This is the consequences of oppression of humanity by the Wealthy and the Influential one, which has made peace an illusion in a world short of core humane values and its application.

Correctly or not, Muslims perceive the Western media as unfriendly. Many factors explain this sense of discomfort. The general attitude of hostility is largely true. Western programmes about Muslims are often slanted to suggest negative images of Muslims. Many carry messages of political instability and the poor treatment of women - the two notorious Orientalist prejudices against Islam.

We witnessed the Danish cartoon controversy, whereby, cartoon caricatures of Prophet Mohammad (SAW) were drawn and published first in Denmark and then subsequently in France, Italy, Germany and Spain. These images clearly presented Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and Islam as inherently violent, whilst suppressing women at the same time. It also ridiculed the Islam and the notion of the reward of women for suicide bombers. This led to a series of violence and protests throughout the world and a boycott of Danish products in numerous Muslim countries.

Most recently, there has been an issue over Facebook and its ban in Pakistan. Facebook had created a page encouraging its users to draw the Prophet Mohammad (SAW) as a protest against extremist threats against freedom of expression and press. This once again, infuriated Muslims and the Pakistan court has temporarily banned the site because of its blasphemy against Islam.

Islam does not allow the depiction of our beloved Prophet Mohammad (SAW) or human images. Moreover, there is no real portrait of the Prophet (SAW). Therefore, even though there have been attempts to identify these cartoons as the Prophet (SAW) himself, it clearly cannot be, due to the fact that there is no image of his to base these drawings on. Moreover, the fact that these images have been labeled as the Prophet (SAW) does not translate to his real image or for that matter, any image of him.

This perspective is believed and practiced by most Muslims worldwide; whilst it is true that a small segment of Muslims revolted violently, simultaneously, majority of Muslims did not

react in this manner due to their indepth understanding of the essence of Islam. The Global Media should have portrayed both these views rather than just targeting specific occurrences.

In response to the publications in several Western newspapers of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad (SAW), a press statement offered by the Vatican on February 5, 2005, regarding Offending Religious Sentiments may be quoted below. The statement emphasized on the "Coexistence Calls for a Climate of Mutual Respect" and stated that *"The right to freedom of thought and expression, sanctioned by the Declaration of the Rights of Man, cannot imply the right to offend the religious sentiment of believers. This principle applies obviously for any religion...In addition, coexistence calls for a climate of mutual respect to favor peace among men and nations. Moreover, these forms of exasperated criticism or derision of others manifest a lack of human sensitivity and may constitute in some cases an inadmissible provocation. A reading of history shows that wounds that exist in the life of peoples are not cured this way"*

Neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian media show photos of civilians from the 'other' who have been killed. Journalistic mechanisms are used by both sides to exaggerate, misrepresent,

dehumanize, and encourage hostility toward the 'other.' These findings were made by Professor Mohammed Dajani of the Sartawi Center of Al-Quds University and Professor Gadi Wolfsfeld

of the Truman Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem during a four months' research how the Israeli and Palestinian media perceived the 'other'. The findings included commentary

by Dr. Hanna Siniora, publisher of The Jerusalem Times, a daily Englishlanguage Palestinian paper, and Shmuel Rosner, news director at Ha'aretz, a daily Hebrew-language Israeli paper.

"The use of journalistic mechanisms makes the readers believe that 'our' victims are a tragedy and 'theirs' are statistics, 'our' actions are legitimate and 'theirs' are evil, our aspirations are noble and theirs are despicable", said Professor Wolfsfeld. The depiction of only one side's

tragedy is accomplished by the location and space allotment of the news items and by personal and dramatic descriptions versus impersonal and analytical descriptions, which dehumanize the 'other.' For example, the killing of a civilian in the conflict would be put on a front page if he were

from the 'side' of that media, and on a much later page with less coverage if he were from the 'other' side. Moreover, newspapers give a sense that *"we're all in this together, so that we can identify with the tragedies,"* said Wolfsfeld. Ethnic and nationalistic solidarity are stimulated by the use of flags in photographs as well as cultural and religious symbols.

In Journalism Ethics, deceiving publics is something students learn not to do in their first public relations class. The new forms of communication channels that have arisen with social media do not change the fact that deception is still morally wrong.

One of the significant limits to media is the lack of neutrality that is inherent. Melone, Terzis and Beleli (2002) argue that professional objectivity must not override the obligation of a reporter to realize that he or she can drastically affect perceptions by the audience to a given situation. Further, they argue that, *"Simply by being there and reporting on a conflict, the*

media alter the communication environment and are thus inherently involved in the conflict and non-neutral' (Ibid., 3).

The characteristic of media is the disparate nature of its goals. Ethical dilemmas emerge when goals conflict. The goals of media usage diverge sharply. Expressed in a consequentialist manner, media usage may be subject to pressures to maximize: economic profits, entertainment value, information provision, the upholding of democratic freedoms, the development of art and culture, fame and vanity. A balancing is required to keep the media on track by creating understanding and conscious level between materialistic purpose and ultimate achievement. The inner contentment is the base of all our worldly endeavor. Whatever the reasons are for conflict, oppression or powerplay, all remedies are available in the core values of all major religions. All religions message is to love the creation, to love the nature, which is blessing for humanity from the creator. Whether one believes in a higher Deity or not, nonetheless, the progression of human civilization and its foundations remain within these religious values.

Pluralism and World Peace

Diana L. Eck in the Harvard Pluralism Project on "What is Pluralism?" states that plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today. But what is pluralism? Here are four points to begin our thinking:

First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettos with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.

Third, pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

Fourth, pluralism is based on dialogue. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the "table" will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table -- with one's commitments.

In 13th century, the mystical poet Jelaluddin al-Rumi wrote in the Masnavi: *"The lamps are different but the Light is the same, it comes from Beyond; If thou keep looking at the lamp, thou art lost; for thence arises the appearance of number and plurality."*

Islam recommends balance and a steady pace. There is the noise and dazzle of the media. Again, Islam emphasizes quiet, meditation and simplicity. The family itself is under attack in today's world. Islam emphasizes the family as the key unit of society and would safeguard it at all costs. Most important, Muslims believe in God in an age dominated by materialism and agnosticism or atheism.

Al Quran states: *And did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief [2:251].*

In another verse Al Quran states: *Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques wherein the name of Allah is mentioned much would surely have been pulled down [22:40].*

The teaching of the aforementioned two verses is very significant in the present world context. The ever lasting teachings, the universal dimension of the message of Islam of these two verses are that if there are no differences between people, if power is concentrated in the hands of one group alone, be it one nation or one race the earth would be corrupt because in worldly setup, our creator is regulating human beings with other human beings to control and to limit their irresponsible impulse and behavior for expansion, supremacy and dominance.

According to Islam, faith in only one God and having common parents Adam and Eve is the greatest reason for humans to live together with peace and brotherhood. Islamic view of global peace is mentioned in the Quran where the whole of humanity is recognized as one family. All the people are children of Adam. The purpose of the Islamic faith is to make people recognize their own natural inclination towards their fraternity.

Prophet Mohammad SAW and Religious Pluralism

Michael H. Hart wrote in, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History..... My choice of Muhammad to lead 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. . .*

He also stated that *"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."*

Alphonse de Lamartine, in *Histoire de la Turquie* stated.....

Never has a man set for himself, voluntarily or involuntarily, a more sublime aim, since this aim was superhuman: to subvert superstitions which had been interposed between man and his creator, to render God unto man and man unto God; to restore the rational and sacred idea of divinity amidst the chaos of the material and disfigured gods of idolatry, then existing. Never has a man undertaken a work so far beyond human power with so feeble means, for he (Muhammad) had in the conception as well as in the execution of such a great design no other instrument than himself, and no other aid, except a handful of men living in a corner of the desert. Finally, never has a man accomplished such a huge and lasting revolution in the world, because in less than two centuries after its appearance, Islam, in faith and in arms,

reigned over the whole of Arabia, and conquered, in God's name, Persia, Khorasan, Transoxania, Western India, Syria, Egypt, Abyssinia, all the known continent of Northern Africa, numerous islands of the Mediterranean, Spain, and a part of Gaul.

.....On the basis of a Book, every letter of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blended together peoples of every tongue and of every race. He has left us as the indelible characteristic of this Muslim nationality the hatred of false gods and the passion for the One and Immaterial God. This avenging patriotism against the profanation of Heaven formed the virtue of the followers of Muhammad; the conquest of one-third of the earth to his dogma was his miracle; or rather it was not the miracle of a man but that of reason.

As far as social pluralism is concerned, Islam seeks for peaceful co-existence and mutual tolerance between the people of different religions and cultures. A Muslim is required to believe in all the Prophets (AH), otherwise he cannot be considered a "Muslim". If a person, for instance, says that I believe in Mohammad (SAW), `Isā, Ibrāhīm and Nūh but not in Mūsā as one of the prophets of God, then he cannot be accepted as a Muslim; similarly, if a person believes in all the prophets but refuses to accept `Isā as one of the prophets and messengers of God, then he is not a Muslim.

In another verse Al Quran states: *We make no distinction among any of the Prophets. --* [Holy Quran 2:135].

To each among you have We prescribed a law and a clear way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but His plan is to test you in what He has given you; so strive as in a race in good deeds [Holy Quran 5:48].

An analytical look of the text of the verse 5:48 manifests that the purpose of these differences is to test, what we do with the revelations and how we behave with the precepts and teachings of Islam and who strive as in a race in good deeds. Diversity of religions, nations and peoples is a test and the teachings of Islam require that we address the differences and live a peaceful harmonious life in this world.

In Islam, religious freedom is essential and is at the centrality of religious teachings and its application by Prophet Mohammad (SAW). Religious Freedom as stated by the Holy Quran had seen its implementation by Prophet Mohammad (SAW); subsequently, its documentation in the Madina Charter and practice of religious freedom allowed tolerance, mutual respect and peace in the history of Islam.

The Charter of Medina and other covenants of Prophet Mohammad (SAW) with Jews and Christians, laid down the principles for building a multi-cultural and multi-religious community. These fundamental rules that Prophet Mohammad (SAW) established have been practiced throughout Islamic history. After Prophet Mohammad (SAW), the caliphs and Muslims in general followed the same way: When Jerusalem came under the rule of Islam, Omar the second caliph, signed a pact with the inhabitants of Jerusalem, which granted security for them and their property. It recognized rights of the Jews and Christians of Jerusalem freely to practice their religion; their churches and synagogues were respected and left intact.

Al Quran states: *O mankind, We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other* [Holy Quran 49:13].

Knowing and respecting each other and dialogue and communication is the best way to avoid mistrust and overcome differences.

Media and Peace

Moral principles may be viewed either as the standard of conduct that individuals have constructed for themselves or as the body of obligations and duties that a particular society requires of its members. In the one case conscience is the originator of moral behavior, and in the other it is the result of moralizing. Between these extremes there have been many avenues originated from pluralistic religious doctrine.

Information is power that has an impact on public discourse. This way, perceptions can be changed by access to media. Different types of media are utilised globally to distribute knowledge and idealistically, free mass media is a tool for democracy. Responsible Media should consider both sides of the story as equally valid and give them balanced representation and voice, not only in direct quotations but also in characterization and analysis. Journalists and media workers have more direct access to more people than at any time in the past - they need to be aware of how they are being manipulated, and on the impact their reporting can have on exacerbating or calming the conflict.

For the media it can be problematic to find a balance between preventing harm caused by speech and protecting individual expression. Being able to find this balance, however is important, especially in conflict situations. Responsible journalism does not just re-publish press releases but is truly concerned with a truthful, balanced and fair account of events. In order to achieve this journalists have to stay clear of judgmental representations and describe reality without exaggeration.

It is probably appropriate to begin to think of reviewing codes of practice. Such a review must in addition to emphasizing the truth, also consider the crucial role of the media in peace building, reconciliation and forgiveness. To some practitioners who are familiar with the era in history when the media experienced certain drawbacks that led to the Social Responsibility theory of the media, perhaps, this is just another crucial moment for the media to take a look at itself again.

Freedom of expression is not only the heart of a strong media but so is respect for fundamental human rights and human values. In this regard, the media may explore and promote the teachings of Prophet Mohammad SAW, who has been regarded as an epitome of responsible leadership and promoter of global peace. The teachings of Islam as emblemed in the teachings of the Holy Quran and the practices of Prophet Mohammad SAW are examples worth taking note of to promote harmony in diversity, tolerance and understanding through dialogues and peaceful cohabitation through acceptance of other faiths.

The Madina Charter is a supreme example of tolerance among a community split among religions and rituals. Before Prophet Muhammad SAW's arrival from Makka, Yathrib (later known as Madina) had a population of 10,000 that was organized into approximately 22



tribes. Approximately half the population was Jewish and half was Arab. Regardless of religion, tribes sought power through military dominance over other tribes, with the numerous alliances forged between warring tribes greatly contributing to the aggression. Constant warfare was taking a toll on the tribes.

The Prophet SAW addressed these power struggles by establishing common goals that would serve the whole community. The Charter specifically advises mutual influence with the declaration that the Muslims and Jews “must seek mutual advice and consultation, and loyalty is a protection against treachery.” The Charter binds the parties of the agreement to helping one another against any attack on Yathrib. It dictates behavior for a specific instance of mutual influence. If the Jews “are called to make peace and maintain it they must do so; and if they make a similar demand on the Muslims it must be carried out.” The Madina Charter addressed potential power complications by focusing the participants on their interdependence. The Madina Charter prohibited independent contention by participant groups that claim God’s protection, and states that the peace of believers is as one. Once again, the idea of being one community was emphasized and the participants of the agreement were made to recognize their power as a unit.

Prophet Mohammad SAW was a steadfast promoter of socio-economic justice. He established an economic system based on fulfillment of basic human needs for all. Interest was prohibited and access to funds were made through other modes of financing based on principles of sharing of risks and return. The system was essentially grounded on welfare for all and has all the ingredients of promoting peace through economic well-being.

Education ushers in knowledge, insights and understanding. It is a unique tool to disperse doubts and prejudice which are often the root causes of confusions and conflict. Prophet Mohammad SAW urged his followers in the continual pursuit of knowledge from cradle to grave. He underscored the importance of education and advocated for knowledge even if it took you to China. In those days, China was a distant and unknown territory for Arabs.

Prophet Mohammad SAW believed in the importance of interfaith dialogues and its potential to promote peace. Such dialogues promote understanding and with understanding comes respects and tolerance.

Hence we find the supreme teachings of Prophet Mohammad SAW on peace, education, interfaith dialogues are time-honored examples of conflict resolution and peaceful cohabitation. In fact it is unfortunate such golden examples are not being capitalized for the benefit of Humanity. In this lies an important role for the media to play. The media, with its power, speed and quality, can promote the teachings of Prophet Mohammad SAW in order to promote lasting peace. After all, He was a personality whose timeless charisma and selfless dedication has captivated the hearts of Muslims and Non-muslims alike. In the words of philosopher George Bernard Shaw in "The Genuine Islam" *"I have studied him — the wonderful man — and in my opinion far from being an anti-Christ he must be called the saviour of humanity."*

Recommendations from Institute of Hazrat Mohammad SAW

- Acknowledge the power of religion towards promoting peace and hence a positive portrayal of religion

- Special attention towards Islam – 2 Billion followers and the fastest growing religion
- Thorough and unbiased research into the lives and teachings of Prophet Mohammad SAW as he has been acknowledged by Muslims and Non-muslims both
- Establish respect for religion through interfaith dialogues at various levels

Conclusion

World peace affects all. Humanity today is at a critical juncture of human history. It is imperative to utilize all means available to recover and sustain peace. Media needs to be capitalized to the full for promoting peace. And peace can only come through promotion and upholding values of righteousness, ethics and respect - the essence of all religions.

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