

My Loving Image of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH¹)

Lily Zakiyah Munir (lilyzm@hotmail.com)²

“None of you (truly) believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”
(The Prophet Muhammad, PBUH)

South Carolina, February 4, 2006

The above citation from the Prophet Muhammad’s *hadith* popped up into my mind as I was following the news here in the US on the worldwide protests staged against the insulting cartoons on the Prophet. Earlier, I received an email from a friend with the website address containing the 12 cartoons, and also from a group email of which I am a member.

My immediate reaction was, like most other Muslims’, emotional. I could not even help from shedding tears. It was like the feeling I had when my beloved kids were hurt or insulted by their naughty friends. It’s even more than that. But then I tried to calm myself down. I prayed to Allah to give me patience and wisdom so that I can react with sanity.

The Genius with Superior Moral Qualities

My childhood times in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) have shaped my loving and respectful image of this special human who is an *uswatun hasanah* (role model for good qualities). His life and his work are a living testimony to his genius. His success in transforming the Arab nomads into societies with shared norms and ethics within ten short years is a tribute to his faith and his superior moral qualities. It is rightly put by Farah (p. 61),³ “That he towered over contemporaries, many of his predecessors and successors alike, is evident in the radical transformation of fundamental values and mores he wrought for a people who hitherto had excelled in their uncontrollable individualism and insatiable egoism.”

Muhammad did not consider his mission as superior to any of the former prophets; he was one of them, but the last to be commissioned by Allah to deliver the same message previously delivered by his former colleagues. He wanted his fellow Arabs to worship one God, the only God, as worshipped by their neighbors, the Christians and the Jews, as ordained in the Qur’an,

“Say, we believe in Allah and in what has been revealed to us, in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; in what was given to Moses and

¹ PBUH stands for peace be upon him, a prayer commendable to be offered when one mentions the name of the Prophet.

² Research Fellow on Islam and Human Rights, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

³ Caesar E. Farah, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances*, New York: Barron’s Educational Series, Inc., 1968.

Jesus, and in what the prophets received from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them. (Q.S. al-Baqarah/2:136)

Ethic of Reciprocity

“Every religion emphasizes human improvement, love, respect for others, sharing other people’s suffering. On these lines every religion had more or less the same viewpoint and the same goal,” so said the Dalai Lama of Tibet.

The Prophet Muhammad’s above *hadith* clearly reflects the Dalai Lama’s saying. Back 15 centuries ago, the Prophet taught his people that if they want to become true believers, they are to treat their fellow human beings the way they wish to be treated. In Christianity this religious precept is often expressed as “*Do unto others as you would wish them do unto you.*”

Religions differ in their concepts of deity, other beliefs and practices. But there is a near unanimity of opinions among almost all religions that each person should treat others in a decent manner. Almost all great traditions have passages in their holy texts, or in the writings of their leaders, which promote this **Ethic of Reciprocity**.

One result of this Ethic of Reciprocity is the concept that every person shares certain inherent human rights simply because of their membership in the human race. People are individually very different, they come into different genders; different sizes, colors, and shapes; different races and ethnic groups; and different levels of ability. They follow different religious and economic systems; and they speak different languages and follow different cultures. But there is a growing consensus that each and every member of human race is of equal importance. All should enjoy basic human rights. The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) is one manifestation of this growing worldwide consensus.

Clash of Ignorance

The incidence of the insulting cartoons on the Prophet Muhammad would not have happened if people in the Jyllands Posten in Denmark had internalized this Ethic of Reciprocity which is an underlying principle of UDHR. This ignorance is perpetrated by their further ignorance of the true essence of Islam, which led to their failure in distinguishing between Islam and its Prophet Muhammad and a number of individuals claiming themselves to be ‘Muslims’ but actually are hijackers of the religion for their political interests.

This incidence refutes Huntington’s thesis that the conflicts between Islam and the West occurs because of the so called ‘clash of civilizations.’ It is not that, but to me, it is because of clash of ignorance.

---***---