



Islām

a Message of Mercy



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ḥafīzahullāh

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ISLĀM: A MESSAGE OF MERCY
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FOREWORD

Islām is always in the news these days. Whilst some people make the effort to try and understand for themselves what Islām is all about, for the majority of people, ignorance and misunderstandings dictate their attitudes to this major world religion. This is a shame, for when one starts to look beyond the headlines and gets acquainted with the real Islām and its Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, a truly balanced, compassionate and merciful set of teachings is revealed.

Shaykh Mawlānā Muhammad Saleem Dhorat *ḥafīzahullāh* has been serving the Muslim community of the UK for almost two decades now, and one of the consistent themes underlying his teachings has been compassion and consideration for others. That Islām teaches tolerance and mercy is beyond doubt; countless verses of the Qur’ān, sayings of the Prophet ﷺ and examples of our pious predecessors testify to this fact. The respected Shaykh has lectured at length on this topic and explained, through authentic sources, how Muslims and mercy are inseparable.

It proved difficult to bring together all Shaykh’s teachings on this important topic due to the abundance of material available. It was therefore decided that this small, easy to read booklet be prepared to serve as an introduction to the subject and an invitation for all - Muslims and non-Muslims - to increase their understanding of the Message of Mercy.

(Mawlānā) Sulayman Bhula



ISLĀM: A MESSAGE OF MERCY

A PERFECT MUSLIM

The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ has stated:

الْمُسْلِمُ مَنْ سَلِمَ النَّاسُ مِنْ لِسَانِهِ وَ يَدِهِ

A (complete and perfect) Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand people are safe.¹

To be a perfect Muslim it is necessary to fulfil all of the requirements of Islām. One of these is to ensure that one does not cause harm to another human being, Muslim or non-Muslim. This is an extremely important component of the teachings of Islām.

In the above ḥadīth, the Prophet's ﷺ use of the word 'tongue' encompasses all forms of speech, whilst the word 'hand' represents all physical actions. It means therefore, that no one can be a perfect Muslim unless the rest of Allāh's ﷻ bondsmen are safe from any harm originating from him.

1 An-Nasa'i

Someone who performs ṣalāh, pays zakāh, observes fasts, recites the Qur’ān in abundance and gives plenty in ṣadaqah cannot be classed a perfect believer if at the same time he also causes people heartache through his words or actions. A person who, without any valid reason, causes hurt to another human being is a Muslim, but not a perfect or complete Muslim.

The religion of Islām branches out into five major areas: ‘*aqā’id* (beliefs), ‘*ibādāt* (worship), *akhlāq* (morals and character), *mu‘āmalāt* (transactions) and *mu‘āsharah* (etiquettes of social life). The branch of *mu‘āsharah*, or social etiquettes, is based on the above-mentioned saying of the Prophet ﷺ. In today’s climate, there can be no more effective method of popularising Islām than the world’s Muslims embracing this branch of faith and living in accordance with it. If Muslims adopt the Islāmic etiquettes of social interaction, it will dispel the many misunderstandings created about Islām and Muslims, making it much easier for non-Muslims to understand and come closer to Islām.

Adopting the Islāmic way of dealing with people gives rise to occasions when a Muslim’s compassionate nature stands out. Intelligent people invariably pick up on such behaviour and become

curious as to why, for example, a Muslim in a position to say or do something hurtful to another person does not do so. A time eventually comes when they enquire from the Muslim in question, presenting an opportunity for him to explain that he was only doing what the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ taught, and that it is a major principle of Islām that no human being should be caused undue distress.

COMPASSION FOR ALL CREATION

The human race is classified as *ashraf-ul-makhlūqāt* (the most noble of creation) and can be divided into Muslims and non-Muslims. Although non-Muslims differ in their beliefs, they are nonetheless from the *ashraf-ul-makhlūqāt*. So compassion and fairness to all human beings is necessary.

The Sharī‘ah of Islām and the teachings of Muḥammad ﷺ go further than just affording rights to humans; they forbid causing distress and harm to the lower life forms too. From the largest beast to the smallest insect, each is a member of Allāh’s ﷻ Creation and deserves consideration and compassion. The only time harming an animal is permitted is when without it more harm would befall other members of Allāh’s ﷻ Creation. It is

permissible to take the life of a snake, for example, in order to save the lives of countless other creatures. It is a principle of the Sharī'ah that the only circumstance when it is permissible to harm a living creature is when not doing so would grant it liberty to inflict the same harm on others.

Regarding Allāh's ﷻ Creation, the Prophet ﷺ has said:

الْخَلْقُ عِيَالُ اللَّهِ فَأَحَبُّ الْخَلْقِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَنْ أَحْسَنَ إِلَى عِيَالِهِ

All creatures are Allāh's dependants, and the most beloved of creatures to Allāh is the one who is good to His dependants.²

Allāh ﷻ nurtures every single creature and provides for all of its needs. Every living thing is dependant on Allāh ﷻ, who is the *Rabb* and Sustainer of all. A person who treats another one of Allāh's ﷻ Creation well, purely for Allāh's ﷻ sake, not for fame or any worldly gain, becomes beloved to Allāh ﷻ. Through this ḥadīth, the Prophet ﷺ stresses the importance of treating people and animals with kindness and compassion. If someone was to help or show kindness to a member of our family, we would remember their favour forever. Allāh ﷻ values every act of kindness with which

one of His creatures treats another.

THE SOFT-HEARTED MUSLIM

However, for treating others well, a person's heart needs to be soft: a home to compassion, tenderness, sympathy and mercy. Someone devoid of these qualities will not be able to treat others well, or if he outwardly does, it will be for some ulterior motive. No matter how many good deeds a Muslim does, if he does not have the qualities of compassion and mercy, his heart will not be deemed free of *qasāwah* (hard-heartedness).

Man's natural state is one of compassion and sympathy, gifted by Allāh ﷻ; when the heart is at equilibrium and man sees his brother in distress, he will feel for him. However, due to disobedience to Allāh ﷻ, the heart becomes rusty and *qasāwah* sets in. An extent is eventually reached when the heart loses its natural function and all sympathy and mercy vanish. A heart of stone results, or something worse. Allāh ﷻ states in the Qur'ān:

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً
وَإِنَّ مِنْ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَقَّقُ

فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَّا يَنْهَيطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ
وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

Then your hearts became hard after that: They became like rocks or even harder. For among rocks there are some from which rivers gush forth; and among them are those which split asunder and water gushes out; and others which fall, for fear of Allāh. And Allāh is not unmindful of what you do.³

If our condition is one where we do not feel for people who are suffering worldly or spiritual harm, it is a sign that our hearts are hardened. Natural disasters and calamities that befall mankind have many wisdoms behind them, one being that people can gauge their state of heart through how they react to them. A lack of compassion demonstrates a heart afflicted with *qasāwah*. And according to a ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ, a heart with *qasāwah* is very far from Allāh's ﷻ Mercy.

وَإِنَّ أْبْعَدَ النَّاسِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْقَلْبُ الْقَاسِي

Truly the furthest person from (the Mercy of) Allāh is the hard-hearted.⁴

It is therefore essential that we turn to Allāh ﷻ

3 Al-Qur'ān, 2:74

4 At-Tirmidhī

and beg Him to cure our hard-heartedness.

THE BEST EXAMPLE

The Prophet ﷺ was the most soft-hearted and compassionate human being ever to walk on this earth. Allāh ﷻ says regarding him:

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ
بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَؤُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

Truly there has come unto you a Messenger from amongst yourselves: it grieves him that you should perish: he is anxious over you: to the Believers is he most kind and merciful.⁵

Allāh ﷻ also states:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

We sent you not (O Muḥammad ﷺ), but as a Mercy for all the Worlds.⁶

Elsewhere in the Qur'ān, Allāh ﷻ states:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًا غَلِظَ الْقَلْبُ لَا نَفُضُوا
مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَأَعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ ---

It is through the Mercy of Allāh that you deal gently

5 Al-Qur'ān, 9:128

6 Al-Qur'ān, 21:107

with them. If you were severe, harsh-hearted, they would have dispersed from about you: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (Allāh's) forgiveness for them...⁷

The soft-heartedness and mercy in the heart of the Prophet ﷺ was a gift and favour from Allāh ﷻ. Without it, the people would not have been able to benefit from him. A demand of mercy is to also forgive those who wrong one, and not only that, but to petition Allāh ﷻ to forgive them too. Thus the Prophet ﷺ was commanded to not only forgive but to seek forgiveness too for his ummah.

This enormous favour of Allāh ﷻ made the Prophet ﷺ a mercy not just for his family, companions, tribe or nation, but for all the worlds, for all time. Mercy was a fundamental and essential quality of all Allāh's Prophets ﷺ. When Allāh ﷻ sent Mūsā ﷺ and Hārūn ﷺ to call Pharaoh towards guidance, He instructed:

فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى

But speak to him mildly; perchance he may take warning or fear (Allāh).⁸

Allāh ﷻ has placed a special quality in using

7 Al-Qur'ān, 3:159

8 Al-Qur'ān, 20:44

a soft and mild tone of voice: it spurs people to contemplate the truth and encourages them to develop fear of Allāh ﷻ.

MERCY ATTRACTS MERCY

When someone reaches this stage of compassion for others, he becomes the object of Allāh's ﷻ Mercy, as stated in a ḥadīth:

الرَّاحِمُونَ يَرْحَمُهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى إِرْحَمُوا مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ
يَرْحَمَكُم مَّن فِي السَّمَاءِ

Raḥmān (the Most Beneficent) will have mercy on the merciful ones. Show mercy to the dwellers of the earth, the One in the heavens will have mercy on you.⁹

This ḥadīth also indicates that in order to acquire the Help and Mercy of Allāh ﷻ, we must first adopt mercy in our dealings with His Creation.

When one's heart becomes soft and fills with compassion, every organ of the body reflects that compassion. The heart commands the hand to do those actions which are merciful and commands the tongue only to speak compassionately. Mercy

becomes a visible aspect of a person's life, there for all to see.

WORLDLY HARM AND SPIRITUAL HARM

The Prophet ﷺ was a mercy for all: those who believed in him and those who did not. A poet has said:

دیکھ کر اخلاق کو اور آپ کے الطاف کو
غیر بھی کہتے ہیں تم ہو رحمۃ للعالمین

Looking at his character, looking at his kindness
Even the non-believers concur that he is the mercy
for all the worlds.

He was the most soft-hearted and sympathetic. He would feel pained whenever he saw anyone in difficulty, whether it related to the world or the hereafter. He especially felt grief when he saw someone sustaining harm related to the hereafter. He once said:

إِنَّمَا مَثَلِي وَمَثَلُ النَّاسِ كَمَثَلِ رَجُلٍ اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا
حَوْلَهُ جَعَلَ الْفَرَاشُ وَهَذِهِ الدَّوَابُّ الَّتِي تَقَعُ فِي النَّارِ يَقَعْنَ فِيهَا
فَجَعَلَ يَنْرَعُهُنَّ وَيَغْلِبْنَهُ فَيَقْتَحِمْنَ فِيهَا فَأَنَا آخِذٌ بِحُجَزِكُمْ عَنِ
النَّارِ وَهُمْ يَقْتَحِمُونَ فِيهَا

My example and the example of the people is that of a man who lit a fire. When it illuminated what was around it, moths and other creatures which are drawn to fire, started falling into it. The man tried to prevent them but they overwhelmed him and rushed into the fire. I am holding on to your waists (belts) to prevent you from falling into the Fire, but you insist on falling into it.¹⁰

Following the example of the Prophet ﷺ, when a Muslim develops mercy and compassion in his heart and becomes cured of hard-heartedness, he remains eager for his suffering brother to be granted relief. If he sees his brother afflicted with worldly hardships, he prays for him and tries to assist him as much as possible. And, like the Prophet ﷺ, when he sees his brother causing himself spiritual harm, he will feel all the more sympathy and pain and long for his brother to be saved from harm in the hereafter.

CONCERN FOR THOSE HARMING THEIR HEREAFTER

Imām Sulaymān Al-A‘mash رحمه الله was a great scholar of Islām and was one of the teachers of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah رحمه الله. The word *a‘mash* is used to describe a person with a squint, and because Imām Sulaymān رحمه الله had such a condition, he came to be known by

10 Al-Bukhārī

that name. He had a student who had a limp and was thus known as *Al-A'raj* after the Arabic term for that condition. The two were inseparable; Imām Al-A'raj رحمته الله was devoted to his teacher and always accompanied him.

Whenever they had occasion to go to the marketplace, the ignorant locals would make fun of the pair and declare, “Al-A'raj is following Al-A'mash,” i.e. the one with a limp is following the one with a squint! One day Imām Al-A'mash رحمته الله instructed his student not to accompany him when he went out into the marketplace. When asked the reason, he explained that it was because of what the people said when they saw the pair together. نُوحِرُ وَيَأْتُمُونَ His student responded: “(What harm is there in what they do?) We obtain reward and they incur sin!” Although this principle is correct - that the one who taunts incurs sin and the one who patiently bears it gets reward - the deep insight and compassion of Imām Sulaymān Al-A'mash رحمته الله led him to reject such a state of affairs. He replied to his student: نَسْلَمُ وَيَسْلَمُونَ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَنْ نُوحِرَ وَيَأْتُمُونَ “That we remain safe and they remain safe is better than our being rewarded and their incurring sin.” Such was his feeling for others. He was prepared to put up with the inconvenience of not having his

student with him and to give up potential rewards in order that other bondsmen of Allāh ﷺ be saved from spiritual harm and distress in the hereafter.

Shaykh Junayd Baghdādī ﷺ (or Shaykh Ma'rūf Karkhī ﷺ) was once walking near a river when a group of unruly youths on a boat started jeering and making fun of him. His companions were outraged at the fact that Muslim youngsters, themselves engrossed in music and drink, were making fun of a great saint and friend of Allāh ﷺ. They asked the Shaykh to curse the youth for their behaviour. The Shaykh replied that he would pray to Allāh ﷻ and his companions were to say, 'Āmīn'. He then offered the supplication: "O Allāh, these youngsters are, according to their understanding, enjoying themselves. O Allāh, grant them the ability to repent so that they may be blessed with the everlasting enjoyments of the hereafter."

THE MESSENGER OF MERCY ﷺ

The concern for the spiritual welfare of others can, of course, be best demonstrated by the example of the Prophet ﷺ himself. After suffering rejection and severe physical maltreatment at the hands of the inhabitants of Tā'if, the Prophet ﷺ is approached by angels who inform him that if he so wishes they will

crush Ṭā'if between the two mountains it is situated between. The Prophet ﷺ declines their offer out of the hope and desire that the dwellers of Ṭā'if would one day accept guidance, and if not, then their offspring would.

Similarly, the Prophet's ﷺ prayer during the Battle of Uhud radiates the highest possible level of human compassion and mercy. During the battle, in which he suffered indescribable grief after losing his beloved uncle Ḥamzah ؓ and during which he suffered wounds to his own person too, he raised his hands and supplicated to Allāh ﷻ: *اَللّٰهُمَّ اهْدِ قَوْمِيْ فَاِنَّهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُوْنَ* “O Allāh, guide my people (the Quraysh who are fighting us) for they do not know (that I am Your Messenger).”

Such a prayer! Not only does the Prophet ﷺ beg guidance for the enemy who are intent on wiping him out, he even offers up an excuse for them before Allāh ﷻ.

And of course the occasion of the Liberation of Makkah saw the compassion and mercy of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ indelibly recorded in the books of history. Entering Makkah after having suffered years of torment at the hands of its inhabitants, victorious yet with utter humility, the

Prophet of Islām ﷺ astonishes the Makkans with his declaration of peace:

لَا تَرْتِيبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ اِذْهَبُوا فَاتُّمُ الطَّلَاقُ

There is no blame on you this day. Go, for you are free.¹¹

The night of the Liberation of Makkah, Hindah ؓ, not yet a Muslim, describes how she slipped out in the dark to Al-Masjid Al-Harām to spy on what the Muslims were doing. In her heart, she expected them to be taking the opportunity to plan the destruction of their enemies. Instead she describes how she saw the Muslims clutching the drapes of the Ka‘bah and beseeching Allāh ﷻ to forgive the enemies of Islām and make them His friends.

Such were the actions of those whose hearts were cleansed through the companionship of the Prophet of Allāh ﷻ.

TEACHINGS FULL OF MERCY

Throughout his life, the Prophet ﷺ maintained his considerate conduct and emphasised repeatedly to the Ṣaḥābah ؓ that they must not do anything that would cause distress to another. The ḥadīth, a

11 Zād-ul-Ma‘ād

(complete and perfect) Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand people are safe, can be regarded as an overarching rule. In addition there are countless sayings and reports of the Prophet ﷺ teaching consideration and compassion towards others.

Miqdād ibn Aswad ؓ relates how he and some companions were the guests of the Prophet ﷺ and residing with him. Whenever the Prophet ﷺ would arrive late at night and pass their resting place, he would greet them in such a tone that those who were asleep would not be awakened and those who were awake would not feel deprived of the Prophet's ﷺ greetings.

It would have been easy for the Prophet ﷺ to just pass by quietly out of consideration for those who were asleep, but his compassion and kindness were of such a sublime nature that he could not bear to hurt the feelings of those who were awake and eagerly anticipating his greeting. Returning home after a hard day, tired and weary, the Prophet ﷺ would still treat people with consideration and compassion. It is worth contemplating over this behaviour of the Prophet ﷺ and asking the question, "If the Prophet ﷺ took such pains to avoid causing a relatively minor inconvenience as this, what must his teachings be regarding avoiding more serious

inconvenience and harm!”

‘Ā’ishah رضي الله عنها describes how the Prophet ﷺ would get up at night to perform tahajjud in such a way as not to disturb her sleep. He would put on his shoes, open and close the door etc. all with such consideration.

‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضي الله عنه reports that on the way to Badr, the Prophet ﷺ shared his mount with Abū Lubābah رضي الله عنه and ‘Alī رضي الله عنه. Both companions رضي الله عنهما ardently offered to give up their turns to ride in order to provide comfort to the Prophet ﷺ. The tenderness and fellow-feeling of the Prophet ﷺ shine out in his refusal. He said:

مَا أَنْتُمَا بِأَقْوَى مِنِّي وَلَا أَنَا بِأَعْنَى عَنِ الْأَجْرِ مِنْكُمَا

You are no stronger than me and nor am I any less in need of reward than you.¹²

Once while travelling, the Prophet ﷺ and his companions رضي الله عنهم stopped to rest. Leaving the Prophet ﷺ under the shade of an acacia tree, the Sahābah رضي الله عنهم dispersed to find places for themselves to rest. A polytheist, seeing the Prophet’s ﷺ sword hanging from the tree, took it and unsheathed it. The Prophet ﷺ awoke and the man said to him, “Who will save

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you from me?”

The Prophet ﷺ immediately replied, “Allāh.”

The polytheist dropped the sword, and picking it up, the Prophet ﷺ said to him, “Who will save you from me?”

The man asked for mercy. The Prophet ﷺ asked him if he wished to accept Islām, but he refused, but did promise not to side with anyone to fight the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ then let him go. The man returned to his people and told them, “I have come to you from the best of people.”¹³

The man was astute and had accepted the truth of Islām when he witnessed the behaviour of the Prophet ﷺ, yet he did not say so when he was asked. He did not want to give people an excuse to say that he was forced to accept Islām at sword-point. He returned to his tribe and declared his Islām. The clemency and kindness of the Prophet ﷺ impelled someone who was threatening to kill him a few moments previously, to declare to his people that he had just met the best person in the world.

The following statement of the Prophet ﷺ

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highlights how Islām pays attention to the smallest details in ensuring that people are not inconvenienced and live in harmony together.

مَنْ أَكَلَ مِنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ يَعْنِي الثُّومَ فَلَا يَقْرَبَنَّ مَسْجِدَنَا

He who eats of this plant (i.e. garlic) should not come to our masjid.¹⁴

In this ḥadīth, the Prophet ﷺ forbids people to come to ṣalāh in the masjid after eating raw garlic because it is a cause of distress to others. It is obvious that if a person with an unpleasant odour stands in the rows of ṣalāh, others will feel distressed and, due to being in ṣalāh, will not even be able to move away. Through such seemingly insignificant points, the Prophet ﷺ educated the Ṣaḥābah رضي الله عنهم to show compassion at all times.

The Prophet ﷺ once gave the example of a man who, through showing consideration for others, received the Mercy of Allāh ﷻ. He said:

بَيْنَمَا رَجُلٌ يَمْشِي بِطَرِيقٍ وَجَدَ غُصْنَ شَوْكٍ عَلَى الطَّرِيقِ فَأَخْرَعَهُ
فَشَكَرَ اللَّهُ لَهُ فَغَفَرَ لَهُ

Whilst a man was walking along a path, he saw a branch hanging over the path. He moved it aside

14 Al-Bukhārī

and Allāh ﷻ acknowledged his deed and forgave him.¹⁵

By making up his mind to show compassion to his fellow road users, and removing a cause of inconvenience to them, the man in the ḥadīth became the recipient of Allāh's ﷻ Mercy. In another narration the Prophet ﷺ says that he saw the man strolling about in Jannah due to this deed.

The importance of a loving and compassionate nature is stressed in the ḥadīth:

الْمُؤْمِنُ مَالِفٌ فَلَا خَيْرَ فِي مَنْ لَا يَأْلَفُ وَلَا يُؤْلَفُ

A believer is a treasure of love; there is no goodness in one who does not love and is not loved.¹⁶

Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ said:

مَنْ يُحْرَمَ الرَّفْقَ يُحْرَمَ الْخَيْرَ

Whoever is deprived of gentleness, is deprived of goodness.¹⁷

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD ﷺ AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

The Prophet ﷺ, as Mercy for the Worlds, was a mercy for the animal kingdom too. ‘Abdullāh ibn

15 Al-Bukhārī

16 Aḥmad

17 Muslim

Ja'far عليه السلام narrates an incident that highlights this fact:

فَدَخَلَ حَائِطًا لِرَجُلٍ مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ فَإِذَا جَمَلٌ فَلَمَّا رَأَى النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
 حَنَّ وَذَرَفَتْ عَيْنَاهُ فَاتَاهُ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَمَسَحَ ذِفْرَاهُ فَسَكَتَ فَقَالَ مَنْ
 رَبُّ هَذَا الْجَمَلِ لِمَنْ هَذَا الْجَمَلُ فَجَاءَ فَتَى مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ فَقَالَ لِي
 يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَفَلَا تَتَّقِي اللَّهَ فِي هَذِهِ الْبَهِيمَةِ الَّتِي مَلَكَكَ اللَّهُ إِيَّاهَا
 فَإِنَّهُ أَشْكََا إِلَيَّ أَنَّكَ تُجِيعُهُ وَتُدْبِيهِ

...The Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ entered a garden belonging to an Anṣārī man and came across a camel. When it saw the Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ it made a pitiful sound and shed tears. The Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ approached it and stroked its neck, at which it fell silent. He said, “Who is the owner of this camel? Whose camel is this?”

A young man from the Anṣār came forward and said, “It is mine, O Prophet of Allāh.”

The Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said, “Do you not fear Allāh with regards to this animal that Allāh has placed in your ownership? It complained to me that you starve it and tire it out.”¹⁸

The Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ also declared:

اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ فِي هَذِهِ الْبَهَائِمِ الْمُعْجَمَةِ فَارْكَبُوهَا صَالِحَةً
 وَاتْرُكُوهَا صَالِحَةً

Fear Allāh regarding these mute animals: mount them when they are fit (i.e. they have fully rested) and dismount from them whilst they are still fit (i.e. before tiring them out).¹⁹

In this ḥadīth the Prophet ﷺ warned people to only ride an animal if it is rested and healthy and furthermore instructed that they should stop riding whilst the animal is still fit, not carry on until it is worn out.

On another occasion, the Prophet ﷺ said:

فَإِذَا ذَبَحْتُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا الذَّبْحَ وَلْيُحِدَّ أَحَدُكُمْ شَفْرَتَهُ فَلْيَرْحَ ذَبِيحَتَهُ

When you slaughter (an animal) be good in slaughtering it; you should sharpen your knife so as to cause as little pain to it as possible.²⁰

The following incident also demonstrates how much sympathy and concern the Prophet ﷺ had for animals:

مَرَّ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ عَلَى رَجُلٍ وَاضِعَ رِجْلَهُ عَلَى صَفْحَةِ شَاةٍ
وَهُوَ يُحِدُّ شَفْرَتَهُ وَهِيَ تَلْحَظُ إِلَيْهِ بَبْصَرِهَا قَالَ أَفَلَا قَبَلَ هَذَا ؟
أَوْ تُرِيدُ أَنْ تُمِيتَهَا مَرَّتَيْنِ

The Prophet ﷺ passed by a man who, with his foot

19 Mishkāt

20 Muslim

on the side of a sheep, was sharpening his knife whilst it was staring at him. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Why (did you) not (do that) before? Do you intend to make it die twice?" ²¹

Allāh ﷻ has given animals the sense to realise when they are in danger. Sharpening the knife in front of an animal or letting it see another being slaughtered is to inflict it with unnecessary distress.

The Prophet of Islām ﷺ warned mankind against mistreating animals. It was the Prophet of Islām who, over fourteen hundred years ago, campaigned on behalf of those members of Allāh's ﷻ Creation who are unable to speak or assert their rights, and he established compassion and justice for them on this planet. Where else in the annals of history can we find such a voice of compassion and mercy?

ISLĀM TEACHES COMPLETE MERCY

The Prophet ﷺ teaches us that our Lord is Ar-Raḥmān (The Beneficent) and Ar-Raḥīm (The Most Merciful). Our Lord informs us that our Prophet ﷺ is رَحْمَةٌ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ 'a Mercy for all the Worlds'. Further, Allāh ﷻ has sent us into the world to be Ar-Ruḥamā' (merciful).

21 Aṭ-Ṭabrānī

إِنَّمَا يَرْحَمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الرَّحَمَاءَ

Allāh only has mercy on those of His slaves who are merciful.²²

And we have been warned:

مَنْ لَا يَرْحَمُ لَا يُرْحَمُ

One who is not merciful will not be shown mercy.²³

The very name of our religion, Al-Islām, is derived from the root word *silṁ*, which means peace and safety. Therefore mercy is a must for a believer and causing even the slightest distress or pain to Allāh's ﷻ Creation is not tolerated. A well-known ḥadīth describes the gravity of the sin of causing distress to Allāh's ﷻ Creation:

عَذِّبَتْ إِمْرَأَةً فِي هِرَّةٍ سَجَنَتْهَا حَتَّى مَاتَتْ فَدَخَلَتْ فِيهَا النَّارَ لَا هِيَ

أَطْعَمَتْهَا وَلَا سَقَتْهَا إِذْ حَبَسَتْهَا وَلَا هِيَ تَرَكَتْهَا تَأْكُلُ

مِنْ خَشَاشِ الْأَرْضِ

A woman was punished due to a cat that she had imprisoned until it died. She was thrown into the Fire because of it. She did not feed it or give it anything to drink when she kept it captive, and she did not let it free so that it could eat of the insects

22 Al-Bukhārī

23 Al-Bukhārī

of the earth.²⁴

So our religion prevents us from causing distress to a cat, let alone another human being, and commands us to show compassion to all Allāh's ﷻ Creation. In another ḥadīth, the enormous reward for a small act of compassion has been described:

بَيْنَمَا كَلْبٌ يُطِيفُ بَرَكِيَّةٍ قَدْ كَادَ يَفْتُلُهُ الْعَطَشُ إِذْ رَأَتْهُ بَغِيٌّ مِنْ

بَغَايَا بَنِي إِسْرَآئِيلَ فَزَعَتْ مُوقَهَا فَاسْتَقَتْ لَهُ بِهِ فَسَقَتْهُ فَغَفَرَ لَهَا بِهِ

A dog was circling a well, almost dead from thirst, when a harlot from the Banū Isrā'īl saw it. She took off her sock, drew water with it and let the dog drink. Due to it, she was forgiven.²⁵

Unfortunately, we do not give this important branch of Islām the attention it deserves. We may engross ourselves in acts of worship but at the same time we behave in such a way that we are a cause of distress to our spouse, our parents, children or neighbours. We are desperately in need of learning from the conduct of our pious predecessors in this regard. A sample of the compassionate teachings of Islām and the compassionate nature of its Prophet ﷺ has been given above. We conclude with a look at the lives of some servants of Allāh ﷻ whose hearts

24 Al-Bukhārī

25 Al-Bukhārī

were filled with love for the Prophet ﷺ and who had inherited a substantial portion of his qualities.

REFLECTIONS OF PROPHETIC MERCY IN OUR ERA

Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘ ﷺ fell seriously ill during the blessed month of Ramaḍān. Anyone in his position, ill during Ramaḍān and sensing the end is near, would have longed to pass away in the blessed month, for the Prophet ﷺ has said: *When Ramaḍān arrives, the doors of Jannah are opened and the doors of Jahannam are closed.* His illness was so severe that it was expected that he would pass away during Ramaḍān, but it was not to be. After the month had passed, Muftī Shafī‘ ﷺ told his friends that during his illness he prayed to Allāh ﷻ not to give him death in the month of Ramaḍān. The reason for his prayer was fear that his death would cause inconvenience to his friends and well-wishers during the blessed month.

Shaykh Mawlānā Ḥakīm Akhtar ḥafīẓahullāh narrated the following story about the late Shaykh Mawlānā Abrār-ul-Haq ﷺ. Once whilst travelling, he needed to perform wuḍū at a maṣjid. In hot countries, the wuḍū areas tend to dry rapidly and ants come out and crawl around. Shaykh Mawlānā Abrār-ul-Haq’s

attendants noticed that he moved from seat to seat until finally he asked them to bring water in a jug so that he could perform wuḍū in another area. When asked the reason for not using the wuḍū facilities at the masjid, he replied that wherever he sat, there were ants that would have been washed away if he had turned on the tap. He declined to use the facilities out of fear that he may cause harm to some of Allāh’s ﷻ Creation.

Mullā ‘Alī Al-Qārī ﷻ includes among the qualities of the highly praised *abrār* (righteous servants of Allāh ﷻ): إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَا يُؤْذُونَ الدَّرَّ ‘The *abrār* do not even harm an ant’. This definition very aptly applies to the late Shaykh Mawlānā Abrār-ul-Haq ﷻ, who was not only Abrār by name but displayed this quality of the *abrār* too.

Muftī Shafi‘ ﷻ relates that once he visited one of his teachers, Shaykh Mawlānā Sayyid Asghar Ḥusayn ﷻ at his house. After eating, Muftī Shafi‘ ﷻ started to roll-up the dining cloth in order to go and shake it off. The elder Shaykh clasped his hand and asked what he was doing. When he answered that he was simply going to shake off the dining cloth, the Shaykh asked: “Do you know how to shake off a dining cloth?” He replied, “O Shaykh! What skill

or art is there in shaking off a dining cloth?”

“Indeed there is an art to clearing a dining cloth,” said the Shaykh, unrolling the cloth again. He then proceeded to move the discarded remains of meat to one side and the bones to another side. The remnants of bread were also grouped separately, as were the crumbs. He then said: “Look! There are four separate things, and I have an individual place reserved for each. The bits of meat are left in a particular place where the cat knows it will find them after mealtimes. Another place is fixed for the bones, that the neighbourhood dogs know about. I place the bits of bread on this wall from where birds come and eat them. The crumbs I place by an ant hole whose inhabitants partake of them.”

Despite having busy schedules and valuing their time immensely, our pious predecessors would go to great lengths to ensure the well-being of Allāh’s ﷻ creatures.

Muftī Shafī‘ ﷻ once asked the same Shaykh Mawlānā Sayyid Asghar Ḥusayn ﷻ why he did not replace the simple dwelling he lived in with a proper brick construction. Once a year all the furniture had to be removed and a fresh coat of plaster applied in order to keep it weather-tight. Over a period of five

or six years, the cost of plastering would have paid for the property to be rebuilt with bricks and mortar. Instead, every year the cost and inconvenience of plastering was endured.

Shaykh Mawlānā Sayyid Asghar Ḥusayn رحمہ اللہ would say he was content with what he had. Once however, when Muftī Muhammad Shafī' رحمہ اللہ was more insistent, the Shaykh revealed his true reason. His neighbourhood was poor and everyone lived in houses made of baked earth; the sight of a brick house would cause others to feel their poverty more. So in order to save them from distress, he refused to renovate his house. Such were the attributes of our pious predecessors; they did so many good deeds, with such sincerity and would try their best to conceal them from others. Unfortunately, today we do hardly anything meritorious yet we long for people to know of our deeds. Muftī Shafī' رحمہ اللہ goes on to report that only after all the other dwellings in his village were renovated did Shaykh Mawlānā Sayyid Asghar Ḥusayn رحمہ اللہ renovate his.

Shaykh-ul-Ḥadīth, Shaykh Mawlānā Razā Ajmerī رحمہ اللہ also used to go to great lengths in his consideration for Allāh's سبحانہ Creation. Whenever melons were eaten at his house, he would ensure the peel was cut up into small pieces and put outside on a sheet of

newspaper. When asked about his actions he replied that he once saw a goat trying unsuccessfully to eat the whole peel of a slice of melon. He therefore decided he would always cut the slices into manageable sized chunks and in addition, he would put them on a sheet of newspaper to avoid stones sticking to them and causing distress to the animals that eat them.

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

These are just a few examples of the tender-heartedness and compassion of the pious saints of our era. Based on their stories of kindness towards animals, just think how much consideration they must have had for human beings. Also, judging by their standard, how compassionate must the folk of bygone eras have been. And what of the compassion of the Ṣaḥābah رضي الله عنهم and more so the Prophets of Allāh عليه السلام. And how merciful must the Leader of all the Prophets عليه السلام, the embodiment of mercy, Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā عليه السلام have been. It is to him that today's world is indebted for the message of mercy and compassion it has inherited.

Our pious predecessors had sympathy for people; they extended help and assistance and

were seen by the people as valuable and useful members of society. Due to their compassionate character, people would enter the fold of Islām. If in their age, anyone had tried to spread the propaganda that Islām teaches violence or injustice, no one would have believed it for a moment.

This is a lesson we need to learn today. We need to adopt compassion and become useful members of society, helping our fellow human beings, the disadvantaged, the elderly and the poor. If we abandon our selfishness for concern for others, Allāh's ﷻ Help will be with us and all the might of media propaganda will fail to slur the image of the beautiful religion of Islām. Mere words and propaganda are impotent in the face of deeds and actions. Actions speak louder than words.
