

## **Equal treatment: Three religions can co-exist peacefully again**

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Many people in Europe and the United States do not know the extraordinary good morals of Prophet Muhammad and that he treated people compassionately, regardless of their religion and social strata.

Many Muslims are not aware of this either. The use of violent discourses against Christians and Jews by certain Muslim countries has led to misconception.

However, verses in the Quran and historical facts show that Prophet Muhammad was fair and compassionate to Christians and Jews, and that he tried to create an atmosphere of love and reconciliation between Muslims and members of these religions.

The greatest testament to this is that Prophet Muhammad allowed Christians and Jews to practise their religions as they saw fit. He provided them with assurances by making treaties that enabled the People of the Book to sustain their existence as autonomous communities.

The first relationship between Muslims and Christians was based on mutual trust. During the early years of Islam, Muslims were subjected to oppression and persecution by the Meccan pagans.

With the recommendation of Prophet Muhammad, they took refuge with the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia (Ethiopia). The Christian King Najashi protected the Muslims and refused to hand them over to the pagans.

After this, the pagans intensified their oppression against the Muslims. Thereupon, Muslims migrated from Mecca to Medina, where they developed a model of co-existence with the Jews already residing there, that would set an example for future generations. Prophet Muhammad attended the weddings of Christians and Jews; visited them when they were sick and honoured them when they visited him.

When the Christian community of Najran visited him, he laid his frock on the ground so that they could sit on it; opened a mosque in Medina for the Najran Christians to worship and married Christian and Jewish women, and had children with them.

The Jews were allowed to partake in the Medina Agreement signed between Muslims and the tribes of Avf and Khazraj. The Jews were allowed to exist as a separate religious group.

The foundation of tolerance Muslims showed towards the Jews were laid out in the following decree in the Medina Agreement, "The Jews of Bani Awf will be treated as one community with the believers. The Jews have their religion."

Articles 26 to 33 state that the People of the Book will have the same rights as Muslims, and the 16th Article states that "they will be treated with equality".

He stated to Christian Ibn Harris Ka'b and his co-religionists the following articles that state: "The religion, churches, lives, chastity and goods of all Christians living in the East and West are under the protection of God, the Prophet and all believers. No Christian will be forced to accept Islam. If a Christian is subjected to murder or injustice, Muslims have to help him." He read the following

verse: "... only argue with the People of the Book in the kindest way. And say: 'We have faith in what has been sent down to us and what was sent down to you. Our God and your God are one and we submit to Him'." (Surat Al-'Ankabut, 46).

This mentality continued after Prophet Muhammad had died. During the spread of Islam, the Jewish and Christian communities were given their freedom to worship and enforce their own laws.

During the era of the Caliphs, churches that were destroyed were restored by Muslims. Christians and Jews were allowed to build new synagogues and monasteries within the Islamic land. For example, the Monastery of Saint Sergius, which was located outside Medina and was previously burnt by Patriarch Mar Amme, was rebuilt during the period of Hazrat Uthman.

All these are clear historical facts with supporting witnesses and documents. However, in many countries today, we come across an extremist mentality of Islam that has no tolerance of living in the same country — let alone in the same city — with Christians and Jews.

In many places, including Europe and especially in the Middle East, incidents range from attacks on places of worship to murder. This aggressive attitude is unique to these extremist groups who base their beliefs on superstition, which has no place in the Quran.

In the Quran, a model society based on love, peace, tolerance and justice is described. For example, in Surat al-Ma'idah, God says that the Torah, which was sent down to Jews, is a guide for people: "We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light, and the Prophets who had submitted themselves gave judgment by it for the Jews. As did their scholars and their rabbis — by what they had been allowed to preserve of God's Book to which they were witnesses." (Surat al-Ma'idah, 44)

A lasting peace among members of the three religions is only possible through the destruction of bigotry and extremism. True religions, religious morality, devout people and adherence to the Quran are necessary to attain this.

Conflicts that occur because of a hunger for land or ideological greed are bound to grow and become terrifying. It is, of course, possible to prevent this from becoming widespread.

Muslims should carry out an educational campaign based on the Quran. Within this campaign, it is essential to emphasise that religions command their followers to live in peace.

Such an education will eradicate the mistakes and hostility caused by bigotry and extremism. Undoubtedly, those who experience such a change of mind will not have any reason to be hostile towards, or fight another religion.

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