

Ten Questions and Answers about the Prophet Muhammad

May the Blessings and Peace of Allah be upon Him

By
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Why did Muhammad marry several women? Did he do so for sexual gratification?

Whenever Prophet Muhammad's name emerges, the image in many people's minds is a man with many wives. For Muslims, his multiple marriages had meaning and immense implications for Islam, and by extension, the history of the world. Needless to say, the issue remains controversial, and as such, any study of the matter requires an objective approach. Therefore we will endeavour to tackle this topic by being as objective as possible.

The Prophet Muhammad was driven by the goal to ensure that his mission as the Messenger of God was fulfilled and to establish a society based on God's commands, and not his own. In order to achieve this goal, he did everything that was humanly possible: he forged relations with the various tribes of Arabia, concluded peace treaties with his sworn enemies and kept relations with the heads of various tribes, nations and religions. Taken together his marriages was one way by

which he fostered relationships with various influential tribes.

If one were to view the marriages of the Prophet from this context, the motivating factors behind his marriages become clear. It would be very simplistic and incorrect to view his marriages as being merely for lustful ends.

Let us now briefly examine the context of each one of his marriages to see whether this was the case. From the outset, it is of ultimate importance to note that, except for one of his wives, all of his eleven wives were widowed or divorced. Most were in fact widowed.

His first marriage was to a widow named Khadijah, who had been married twice and whom he married when she was forty years old and he was twenty five. She was the first woman to embrace Islam. She provided great consolation to him throughout his life and he continued to remember her in his later years as his most beloved wife. He stayed with her faithfully for 25 years until her death, at which time he was 50 years old, and she was 65 years old.

If he was driven by lustful desires as accused by his opponents, he could have married several, beautiful young women in a society where having numerous wives was a norm – there would be no reason to faithfully remain with an older woman until the age of 50. This single fact would be sufficient to totally refute the charges against him in this regard. However, an examination of all of his marriages, as we shall see, should put this question to rest.

After Khadija's death, he married another widow, Sawda, who was 65 years old. She and her previous husband, Sakran, were among those who had immigrated to Ethiopia, fleeing from the oppression and persecution of the Meccans. It was during their return to Mecca that her husband had died. Seeing her difficult condition, the Prophet married her.

Then he married Aisha, daughter of his lifelong friend and companion Abu Bakr. Aisha had first been betrothed to Jabir bin Mut'im at the age of 5. Child marriages were evidently the norm at that time. She was the only virgin among the

Prophet's wives and the only one who was born into a Muslim family.

One of the Prophet's goals in this marriage was to strengthen the bond of his brotherhood with Abu Bakr, who was his main defender against the Meccans. Second, Aisha was of a lineage known for honor and intelligence. The Prophet knew that she would tremendously benefit his nation (*ummah*) by transmitting crucial knowledge from his life, especially family and personal matters that others were not privy to. Indeed, the Prophet advised his community to learn half of the knowledge of the religion from Aisha. The foresight of the Prophet proved itself, for she would live for 45 years after his death, and thus became one of the main sources of Prophetic wisdom and knowledge.

He also married another widow, Hafsa, who was the daughter of Umar Bin Khattab, his next closest companion. Her husband, Khunays, had been martyred in the Battle of Badr. He felt a duty towards Umar, whose acceptance of Islam provided a major boost for the Muslims in Mecca against their foes.

Zaynab, daughter of Khuzaima, was another widow that the Prophet married. She was married to Ubayda bin al-Haris, who was martyred in the Battle of Badr. She was sixty when the Prophet married her. She was known as the “Mother of the Downtrodden”. She, however, passed away after two or three months of marriage.

He married another widow, Umm Salama. Her previous husband, Abu Salama, was martyred in the Battle of Uhud, leaving behind four orphans. Umm Salama was pregnant at that time and was extremely distressed and very sad. Needless to say, she needed much support. After her delivery, Umar proposed that the Prophet marry her. The Prophet accepted the proposal and married her. What purpose can there be for a person of 54 to marry a widow with four orphans except love, mercy and compassion? There was another crucial factor in this marriage: Umm Salama was from the Bani Makhzum tribe, which was the tribe of Islam’s arch enemies at that time, Abu Jahl and Khalid bin Waleed. Though Abu Jahl never changed, Khalid later accepted Islam and became a brilliant military general. Once again, bringing

influential and powerful tribes closer to Islam was one of the noble objectives of the Prophet's marriages.

He married a divorced woman, Zaynab, the daughter of Jahsh. She was married to Zayd bin Haritha, the freed slave of the Prophet. She was the cousin of the Prophet, being the daughter of his paternal aunt. Zayd divorced her and the Prophet married her when she was 38 years old. His marriage to Zaynab was aimed at emphasizing the invalidity of the age-old Arab practice of taking adopted sons as real sons. The marriage was divinely sanctioned, as stated in the Qur'an, "When Zayd had come to the end of his union with her, We gave her to you in marriage ..." (33:37)

Umm Habiba was another widow whom the Prophet married. She was a daughter of Abu Sufyan who was a bitter enemy of Islam until his conversion later. She was initially married to Ubaydallah, who was a companion of the Prophet. Both immigrated to Ethiopia, fleeing the persecution of the Meccans. Ubaydallah became a Christian and later died there. Considering her very difficult situation, her father being an enemy of

Islam and her husband a deserter, the Prophet sent an envoy to Negus, king of Ethiopia requesting to arrange a marriage with her. The king arranged the marriage and she was married to him when she was 36 or 37 years old. Like many of his marriages, his marriage to Umm Habiba resulted in bringing a major tribe of the Quraysh, Banu Abd al-Shams, towards Islam.

He married another widow, Juwayria. Both her father and husband were bitter enemies of Islam; the former had planned to attack Medina at the instigation of the Meccans. This led the Muslim army to march against the clan of her father. The result was their defeat at the hands of the Prophet and the death of Juwayria's husband. After the conflict, the Muslims captured many prisoners, one of whom was Juwayria. Juwayria's father offered a ransom for her freedom. She requested to stay in the service of the Prophet and he married her at her request. Her marriage resulted in the freeing of all the prisoners of war of her tribe. Again, this marriage led to the establishment of peace and friendly relations.

He also married a woman named Safiyya, a widow as well. Her second husband was killed in the Battle of Khaybar. Her father was the chief of the famous Jewish tribe, Banu Nazir. He was killed in the Battle of Khaybar, and so Safiyya was taken prisoner. She was eventually freed and the Prophet married her. Some complained that she was sympathetic to the Jews. Her answer was that they were her relatives, and the Prophet defended her position. He told her to respond in the following way: “My father is Aaron (Haroon) and my uncle is Moses (Musa).” This marriage had led to a closer relationship between the Muslims and the Jews of Medina.

His final marriage was to another divorced woman, Maymuna. She was married twice and was very old. She married the Prophet when he was 57. The reason for her marriage was that the Prophet’s uncle, Abbas, suggested it in order to bring her tribe – Halaliyyeen – to the fold of Islam. That was actually what happened; after his marriage to her, they entered Islam in hosts.

From the above, we see that it was not the Prophet’s whims and desires that initiated his

marriages, but rather it was that God had planned his marriages. He commanded His Messenger after the last marriage (with Maymuna) not to marry any more (Qur'an 33:52), because by that time the objectives of his marriages were achieved as the Prophetic mission was near to completion.

All of this does not mean that the Prophet was not interested in sex. He was surely attracted by sex and beauty, and was not a prude in expressing it. He said, “perfume and women are made dear to me. However, the joy of my eye is in prayer.” He also said: “I am in full control of myself.” In fact, a look at his life would suggest that he approached the various aspects of human life with moderation - be it eating, drinking, or enjoying time with his wives – never indulging in any one thing excessively. The portrayal of him by many Western writers as promiscuous and licentious, mostly due to the fact that he had numerous wives, is far from the truth and historical facts as shown above. Indeed, his marriages had a social motive and a higher goal than mere sexual gratification.

It would be relevant here to quote a female, Western scholar, Karen Armstrong, the author of *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*, in relation to the issue of Prophets marriages and polygamy in Islam: “The Qur’anic institution of polygamy was a piece of social legislation. It was designed not to gratify the male sexual appetite, but to correct the injustices done to widows, orphans, and other female dependents, who were especially vulnerable. All too often, unscrupulous people seized everything and left the weaker members of the family with nothing... Polygamy was designed to ensure that unprotected women would be decently married, and to abolish the old loose, irresponsible liaisons; men could have *only* four wives and must treat them equitably; it was an unjustifiably wicked act to devour their property... The Qur’an was attempting to give women a legal status that most Western women would not enjoy until the nineteenth century. The emancipation of women was a project dear to the Prophet’s heart...”

Did Prophet Muhammad spread Islam by the sword and force people to accept his religion?

It is a widespread belief that Islam was spread by the sword. There are two main reasons showing that this was in fact not the case.

First, the Messenger of Mercy, Prophet Muhammad, proclaimed that he would adhere to God's commandments. And contrary to forcing people to accept Islam, God explicitly prohibited forced conversion: "There is no compulsion in faith" (Qur'an 2:256)

There is an interesting story related to the revelation of this verse. A man, who was among the companions of the Prophet, had two sons who embraced Christianity before the emergence of the religion of Islam. The two sons came to Medina among a group of Christians, and at that time their father insisted that they both should become Muslims. However, they refused their father's request and brought the matter before the Prophet. The father asked, "Oh Prophet of Allah, how could part of me enter hell while I am watching?" It was then that God revealed the above verse

forbidding any compulsion in religion. Thus, the man's two sons were free to remain Christians. The Messenger of Mercy did not force them to become Muslims according to their father's wish.

In another verse, the Qur'an says: "But had your Lord so willed, all who are on the earth would have believed in your message, each one of them and all of them together - will you then be the one to compel people so that they become believers, O Prophet?" (10:99). All admit, even those who accuse the Prophet of forced conversions, that the Prophet was a God-fearing person who obeyed Him whole-heartedly in everything. How, then, can he violate these explicit divine commands?

There are even authentically recorded incidents in which the Prophet advised some individuals not to accept Islam for a time being, due to their safety. In one instance, a person by the name of Amr bin Abasa Assulami came from a far distance to Mecca to embrace Islam. It was a time when Muslims were persecuted in Mecca and it was extremely difficult to meet the Prophet. Somehow, Amr managed to find the Prophet and he expressed his desire to embrace Islam. The

Prophet, however, told him that he should not embrace Islam at that time, since the situation between the Prophet and his people was dangerous. The Prophet then advised Amr to go back to his family until the victory of the Prophet becomes apparent. It was not until approximately 7-8 years later that Amr met the Prophet again to embrace Islam. Surely, had the Prophet been only concerned with converting people despite their own safety, he would not have advised Amr to return to his family on account of the imminent danger.

It is true that the Prophet was extremely keen to convey God's message and to lead people to salvation. The Qur'an describes this eagerness: "Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?" (18:6). But this eagerness never prompted him to convert even a single person against his will.

Second, there is no historical evidence suggesting that the Prophet Muhammad acted contrary to the principle that there should be no compulsion in religion. There is not a single

recorded instance in the Prophet's thoroughly documented life of such an incident. Although some early Western historians advanced such claims, more recent studies have shown that conversions did not happen suddenly at the point of the sword, but when people living alongside Muslims gradually and genuinely accepted the faith voluntarily. Indeed, it is as the Orientalist George Sale said: "Whoever says that Islam spread by the power of the sword, his/her word is a pure allegation, because the sword was not even mentioned in many countries and Islam spread there."

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation of India, once said, "I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place in Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for his pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and his own mission."

The famous French historian Gustaf Lobon stated in his book, *Arab Civilization*, "Power was

not a factor in the spread of Islam; that's because Arabs left the people they vanquished free to practice their own religion.”

Another famous European writer, Thomas Carlyle, said: “Accusing [the Prophet] of relying on the sword for people to respond to his preaching is incomprehensible nonsense!”

History, logic, objectivity, and scholarly research all reject the notion that the Prophet Muhammad forced his religion on unwilling masses. It was voluntary acceptance and the utter conviction of the truth of Islam that caused mass conversions in many countries. Indonesia, Malaysia, China and several South Asian countries are telling examples of this reality. We can see a glimpse of this today – though in a less dramatic way – in Europe and North America where in those continents Islam is the fastest growing religion.

Did Muhammad write the Quran? Did he plagiarize the Bible?

The charge against the Prophet Muhammad that he concocted the Qur'an is a very prevalent one, especially in the West. Even those who are sympathetic to Islam among Western writers cannot admit that the Qur'an is revelation and its author is God himself. There is a long and deep-rooted tradition in Western literature that views the Qur'an as the work of the Prophet. Thus, we will look at this issue, though extremely briefly, in light of well-documented historical facts, logic, as well as with respect to the Prophet's personality, life and career.

The Prophet Muhammad is perhaps the most fully documented person in antiquity and history. This fact enables us to examine closely the claim that he wrote the Qur'an himself. This is a topic of volumes, as scholars have discussed in detail hundreds of strong evidences that establish the divine origin of the Qur'an. Considering the scope of this booklet, we will mention just a few.

First, it was well-known among the early Arabs of Mecca that the Prophet Muhammad did not read or write, and was not formally educated. The Qur'an itself states that the Prophet was unlettered, specifically in the sense that he could not read or write. No one in the Meccan community attempted to deny this claim of the Qur'an: "Believe, then, in God and His Messenger – the **unlettered Prophet** who believes in God and His words – and follow him, so that you might find guidance!" (7:158)

As is recorded in his biography, when the angel Gabriel approached the Prophet for the first time at the age of 40, and revealed to him the first verse of the Qur'an, "Read!", the Prophet's response was that he was unable to read. Thus even at the start of revelation, the Prophet was in no position to compose a book. Indeed as the Qur'an states, the Prophet's being unlettered was itself a matter of divine wisdom: "Never have you recited Scripture before this (Qur'an oh Prophet)! Nor have you transcribed one with your right hand. For then, the progenitors of falsehood

would have had cause to doubt (the revelation).”
(29:48)

Second, in various instances in the life of the Prophet Muhammad where a problem arose, he was unable to find a solution until it was revealed to him by God. In many of these instances, the answer was delayed often causing the Prophet great anxiety. If the Prophet had devised the answers himself, why would he need to wait on revelation? Here are a few examples:

- Once a group of people accused the Prophet’s wife Aisha of adultery. The slanderous accusations shook the community in Medina, and resulted in the Prophet separating from his wife temporarily. During this extremely difficult ordeal he did not know what to do. Finally, verses were revealed that established the innocence of Aisha and rebuked those who made the false accusations against her.
- The leaders of Quraysh once asked the Prophet a few questions in order to test him and to see if he really is the Messenger of God. They asked about stories and issues, such as the Seven Sleepers, Dhul Qarnain, the

nature of the spirit, etc. Weeks had passed and the Prophet would not give any answers, because he did not have knowledge of them at that time. As a result of the delay, the Prophet was accused of being a liar by the Quraysh. Finally, the Prophet received by revelation a whole chapter of the Qur'an, called the Cave (Chapter 18), as well as other verses, answering all the questions asked to the Prophet by the Quraysh.

- In the early days of Islam, the Muslims used to face Jerusalem while praying. The Prophet wished and wanted to change the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca. But he did not instigate the change himself; instead, he waited for a command from his Lord, raising his head towards the heavens in anticipation. The Qur'an states: "We have seen you (O Prophet) often turn your face towards heaven..." (Qur'an 2:144). Thereafter God's commands arrived, and Muslims immediately turned their faces towards the direction of Mecca, turning from North to South.

In all of these incidents and many others the Prophet did not act until revelation came to him with an explicit answer or command. This was the case even though the delay caused him to be rebuked and accused of being a false Prophet. If the Qur'an were from the Prophet, surely he could have "revealed" the verses earlier. This shows the Quran is a revelation from God, and not from Muhammad's own imagination.

Third, the Arabs, both Muslims and non-Muslim, have testified to the high calibre and literal mastery of the Qur'an:

- Umar bin al Khattab used to be a judge of the poetry festival in Mecca. His mastery of the Arabic language was superb. Nonetheless, when he heard a portion of the Qur'an, he was spellbound, and because of it embraced Islam. How could the Prophet produce such a literal masterpiece at the age of 40 when he had never shown such talent before?
- Similarly, there were many others like At-Tufayl bin Amr al-Dawsi, Utbah bin Rabiha and others who had such experiences when they heard portions of the Qur'an. They

would repeat statements such as, “I have heard words of such that I never heard before. By God, it is not poetry, nor magic, nor divination.” This was often their first impression. This shows that the Qur’an was something beyond the Prophet’s talent or genius, as its origin was other than the Prophet Muhammad.

Fourth, there is a marked difference between the Prophet’s sayings and Qur’anic verses. The Prophet’s sayings are recorded in volumes, called *hadith*, which are more voluminous than the Qur’an. When he spoke, his sayings were not accompanied with any extraordinary experiences, but when he received the revelation he would often experience abnormal sensations. When verses were revealed to him, sometimes he would sweat even on cold days, his face would become red, his body would become heavy, etc. Was he just acting? Definitely not! How could he have lived such a pretentious and complicated life for 23 years? This is indeed the difference between the *hadith* and the Qur’an. As for the Qur’an, he received it by

revelation from God verbatim, and as for the *hadith*, they were his own words.

Another crucial point in this respect is the huge difference between the linguistic style of the Qur'an and that of *hadith*. A comparison of both suggests unequivocally that the author of the Qur'an is entirely different from that of the *hadith*. It is also recorded authentically that the Arabs themselves were surprised by the language of the Qur'an because the Prophet was not known to have composed any literal piece before its revelation. Clearly, the language of the Qur'an was not from Muhammad's own tongue. Even non-Arabic speaking people can see this vast difference in style and language between the Qur'an and the *hadith*, even by reading translations.

Fifth, a good portion of the Qur'an includes stories of previous Prophets and their nations. Always, the concluding remark is that the Prophet had no previous knowledge of any of those stories or historical events, and that he only knew of them through revelation, for example:

- After relating the story of Moses and Pharaoh the Qur'an states: "You were not (there, O

Prophet,) on the western mountainside (of Tur) when We decreed to Moses the Commandments. Nor were you (there among those) of the Children of Israel who bore witness (to these events). Furthermore, We brought forth (many) generations (after Moses), such that the life spans (of heedlessness) that stretched over them grew (so very) long – (until they forgot God’s Covenant). Moreover, you were not (there with Moses when he was) dwelling among the people of Midian, conveying Our message unto them...” (28:44-45)

- The Qur’an also states after the story of Jesus and Mary: “This account of something that was beyond the reach of your perception We [now] reveal unto you: for you were not with them when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary’s guardian, and you were not with them when they contended [about it] with one another.” (3:44)
- It also states after the story of Joseph: “This is (but one) of the tidings of the unseen (past) that We reveal to you, (O Prophet). For you were not with them when they resolved (to

execute) their (evil) affair, and while they were plotting (it).” (12:102)

Verses like the above appear routinely after the stories in the Qur’an. Thus, if the Prophet had learned these stories from Jews and Christians, why should he ascribe them to God? Is he such a blatant liar?

Sixth, the Qur’an severely criticized the Prophet on several issues:

- The Prophet was once sitting with some of the leaders of Quraysh, inviting them to Islam. A blind man, Abdullah bin Umm Makhtum, who was already a Muslim, came to the Prophet to ask him some questions regarding Islam. The Prophet ignored him, as he was busy delivering the message of Islam to the leaders of Quraysh, hoping they would come to Islam. Thereupon the revelation came reproaching and reprimanding him: “He frowned and turned away because the blind man approached him. Yet for all you did know (O Muhammad) he might perhaps have grown in purity?” (80:1-3).

- The Prophet used to love to eat honey. Once he refused to consume any honey after his wives discouraged him to do so, as a result of a quarrel they were having among themselves. God again reproached and reprimanded him: “O Prophet! Why do you, out of a desire to please [one or another of] your wives impose [on yourself] a prohibition of something that God has made lawful to you?” (66:1).
- At the time of the battle of Tabuk, some hypocrites came and asked the Prophet to excuse them from participating in the campaign. The merciful Prophet accepted their excuse. Thereupon revelation came down upon him again reproaching and reprimanding him: “May God pardon you (O Prophet)! Why did you grant them permission (to stay at home) before it had become obvious to you as to who was speaking truth and (before) you came to know (who were) the liars” (9:43).

There are many other incidents in which the Prophet was reproached and reprimanded by God. The logical question here is why would the Prophet

make up these verses? Even if someone had revealed these verses to him, why would he retain them while having a firm belief that these verses will be recited and read throughout the ages? The logical and factual answer is that these are not the words of the Prophet, and he is not the author of the Qur'an.

Seventh, one of the major themes of the Qur'an is that the source of the Qur'an is God Himself. The Prophet did not have any right to add or subtract from what had been revealed:

If he (Muhammad) had dared to attribute some of (his own) sayings unto Us, we would indeed have seized him by his right hand and would indeed have cut his life-vein." (69:44-46)

If the Prophet was really the author of the Qur'an, why did he have to state these words? Was he a sheer liar to the extent that he both concocted the Qur'an and devised threats against himself? History and logic would refute this claim, especially since the Prophet was known never to have uttered a lie in his whole life. Before Prophethood, even the pagan idolaters attested to

his truthfulness, and he was known as the “Trustworthy” and “Truthful”. Are we to believe that suddenly, at the age of 40, the Prophet not only began to utter a long string of lies but that these lies were against God Himself? Simply illogical!

The charge of plagiarizing the Bible?

The charge that the Prophet plagiarized the Bible is unfounded due to the following reasons:

First, there are hundreds of references in the Qur'an relating to the incidents that occurred deep in the past that are not found in the Bible. For example, Adam's repentance in Paradise and God's acceptance of it, which essentially refutes the core Christian concept of original sin. The Qur'an also mentions various incidents of Prophets not found in the Bible, such as Abraham's being thrown into a fire only to be saved by God and Abraham's construction of the holy place of worship, the Kaaba, at Mecca. It also recounts many crucial parts of the histories of Noah and Jesus, some of which completely contradict the Biblical account. Where did Muhammad get all of this information? For sure, it could not have been the Bible. How can anyone argue with his right mind that he plagiarized the Bible?

As for the charge that he learned the whole Qur'an from the Christian monk Bahira, this would be an absurd accusation on two counts, at least.

First, the meeting between the Prophet and the monk was only for a brief moment in time and when the Prophet was only 12 years old. The monk invited the caravan in which the Prophet was travelling in for a dinner while the caravan was en route to Syria. It would be inconceivable for the Prophet to have learned all of what he needed to learn from Bahira in one short meeting. Moreover, there is no historical record of his learning the Bible from Bahira, although there are records of the monk's predicting the prophethood of Muhammad that he learned from Jewish –Christian scriptures

Second, vast portions of the Qur'an (including many of its longer chapters, such as Chapters 5, 8, 9, 24, 33, 48, etc.) deal with the political and social issues the Prophet faced in Medina for over ten years. How could these chapters be dictated to him by Bahira? It is mind boggling that such an argument was forwarded by a French author who claimed the Prophet learned the whole of the Qur'an from Bahira in one short sitting.

As mentioned, there are many claims that the Prophet learned a lot of the historical references of

the Qur'an from Christians or Jews who lived during his time. One such argument states that there were two Christian missionaries who would visit Mecca during the annual fairs, from whom the Prophet may have received knowledge. However, these Christians had passed away long before the Prophet Muhammad was alive and so it would be impossible for them to have taught him.

Did Muhammad lead numerous wars that were barbaric and bloody?

The Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Mercy, did not prescribe war as a natural state of affairs, and at the same time, war cannot simply be abolished. What any reformer or spiritual leader can do is minimize its brutality. The Messenger of Mercy, at God's direction, attempted to establish rules of warfare that would make war as humane as possible, to encourage peace and to minimize the priceless cost of human lives.

The Prophetic approach to war can be better appreciated by looking at some figures. The Messenger of Mercy was forced to defend himself militarily on many occasions, yet the amount of human loss that resulted is surprisingly low given similar battles and wars in human history. From a total of 28 battles and 38 campaigns, the total casualties from those wars, including both sides, amounted to approximately 1 284 lives.

Someone can argue that the reason for the decreased numbers of casualties is because of the smaller number of combatants that participated in

the various campaigns. But a careful examination shows that the percentage of people killed in these wars relative to the number of the people who participated in them amounted to about 1.5 percent. Since the Messenger of Mercy was victorious in most of these battles, the numbers of casualties indicate that he is not to be counted among the ruthless and barbaric warlords, conquerors, and military generals of human history – and in fact, far from it.

Compare the above numbers to other wars in human history. For example, in the Second World War alone, the relationship between the amount of people killed (including civilians) to the amount of combatants who were involved in that war was 351%. That is, 10 600 000 participated in that war yet the amount of human deaths were as high as 54 800 000.

Contrary to promoting barbaric warfare, the Messenger of Mercy brought sweeping changes to the conduct of war, radically limiting the means and use of violence against others. Much like today, the Messenger of Mercy lived in a world in which brutal warfare was rampant. Like the Roman

and Persian empires of that time, and the empires of today, the Arab tribes primarily engaged in battle for material gains rather than for any higher, moral purpose. The Messenger of Mercy, however, would change that radically.

The Messenger of Mercy stressed the observance of several important moral principles even during the tumult of warfare. First, he fundamentally redefined the basic understanding and concept of war. By introducing an entirely new term – *jihad fee sabil Allah* – he purified warfare from its purely material or vested interests and self-serving motives. *Jihad* means “struggle” and for one to carry a concerted effort to remove the injustices and oppression imposed by others. By adding “in the way of Allah” (*fee sabil Allah*), he taught that war must not be waged for the sake of the self, of spoils, pride, prestige, subjugation, or oppressing other people. This belief served as the glue holding the principles of warfare together and reining in all potential injustices inherent within it.

Under this new conception of war, the Messenger of Mercy introduced a comprehensive set of laws that encompassed the conduct of war:

its moral boundaries, components, rights, and obligations; the difference between combatants and non-combatants and their rights; and the right of envoys, prisoners of war, and conquered people. All of these principles were expressed clearly and unequivocally by the Messenger of Mercy.

The Messenger of Mercy also underscored the sanctity and inviolability of human life, be it Muslim or non-Muslim. He embodied the Qur’anic verse: “If anyone slays a human being – unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth – it shall be as though he had slain all humanity” (5:32). Through this divine instruction, the Messenger of Mercy purified war from all selfish motives and inferior objectives. His followers, although they certainly were – and still are – prone to great errors, were remarkable exemplars of these principles in general.

The Messenger of Mercy prohibited the robbery, banditry, and vandalism that had been commonplace in wars before his time. For example, after the Khaybar peace treaty had been signed, some of the new, young Muslims started looting Jewish property. The Jewish leader came to

the Messenger of Mercy and asked: “Is it appropriate for your people to slaughter our donkeys, devour our crops, and beat our women?” Suddenly, the Messenger of Mercy ordered the entire army into the mosque for prayer and told them: “Allah did not permit you to enter the People of the Book’s houses without permission and to beat their women and eat their crops”. If a milking animal is found on the way and soldiers want to take its milk, they cannot do so unless permission is granted. Therefore, even in warfare, the Messenger of Mercy stressed the importance of the rule of law and respect for the property and rights of others, which is far more than we can see in modern wars.

In the past, armies destroyed crops, farmland and property, and even entire villages. But the Messenger of Mercy prohibited killing all non-combatants, such as women, children, the old, the sick, the wounded, the blind, the disabled, the mentally unwell, travelers, monks, and worshippers. In fact, he only permitted killing those in the front lines; everyone behind them was protected from attack. Remarkably, the Messenger

of Mercy here grants far more than what is stated in theories of just war today. Once the Messenger of Mercy saw a woman's corpse on the battlefield and became very upset. He therefore ordered his commander, Khalid ibn al-Walid: "Do not kill women or labourers..." Moreover, the Messenger of Mercy specifically commanded Muslims not to kill monks or worshippers, and not to destroy places of worship.

Before Islam, both Arabs and non-Arabs, in the heat of vengeance, habitually burned their enemies alive. The Messenger of Mercy categorically prohibited this: "Nobody should punish with fire except the Lord of Fire (God)". He also forbade desecrating and mutilating the enemies' corpses by cutting off their limbs.

The Messenger of Mercy prohibited the killing of prisoners of war, declaring that: "No wounded person will be killed, no one who flees will be followed..."

The Messenger of Mercy also stated that one cannot breach one's trust and kill those with whom peace has been made. No peace treaty should be violated: "If you have made a treaty with a people,

you cannot make any changes or alterations until it expires...”

Today, in a time of constant war under pretexts of pre-emptive strikes, these teachings demonstrate his just personality – a Messenger for our time.

The Messenger of Mercy tried his utmost to reduce human casualties to marginal amounts. Anyone who studies the Messenger of Mercy’s wars objectively and compares that with other wars in human history including the wars of our modern times (such as the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the War on Terror) can easily conclude that his wars were the least bloody – and most humane.

Many portray the Messenger of Mercy as a war monger and blood thirsty as if fighting battles was his main occupation. But in reality, out of the ten years of his life in Medina, only 795 days were spent on battles and expeditions. The rest of the ten years (that is approximately 2865 days) he spent on bringing revolutionary changes to people’s lives and totally reforming a pagan society. This historical fact is overlooked by most of his

biographers and almost all Western writers who depict him as a war-monger.

Muhammad executed barbaric corporeal punishments – is it true?

The Prophet Muhammad, Messenger of Mercy, turned a society that was plagued with crimes and injustices into one that Muslims believe was utopian. The Prophet achieved this by following God's command, and by among other things, addressing the root ills of society and applying a just and working legal system.

Let us take as an example the case of adultery and sexual promiscuity. When the Prophet arrived in Medina adultery was rampant and prostitution was a profitable business. First, he raised the moral consciousness of his people against such vices, which took him considerable time. Then he closed the doors of brothels and cleaned up the whole community.

To understand the Prophetic legal system, one must understand that the Prophet was concerned with all aspects of human life: from the personal to the societal realms, as well as the spiritual. The Prophet addressed the concerns of the individual's

and society's worldly here and now as well as the spiritual hereafter.

With regards to this world, in analyzing the societal benefits of the legal system brought by the Prophet one realizes that at its core the Islamic legal system (*Sharia*) has much in common with most legal systems. For instance, in attempting to achieve safety and security in human societies, legal systems – including the Islamic one – employ the principle of *deterrence*. The idea being that by introducing a threat of punishment, the individual would be less likely to commit a specific crime.

Take, for example, the crime of murder. If a person knew nothing would happen to him if he were to kill someone, he would not be as deterred than if he knew that he would serve time in prison, or perhaps lose his own life as a consequence of his actions. By deterring an individual from committing heinous acts through punishment, more lives are saved and society is more secure. As the Qur'an states, "There is preservation of life for you in retribution, O people of understanding..." (2:179)

In attempting to balance the concerns of victims and society, legal systems, and the Prophetic legal system (*Sharia*) included, employ the principles of retribution and restitution. By retribution and restitution, the public takes back from the criminal the advantage he has unfairly taken by committing the crime in question from the public and the victim. Otherwise, leaving the criminal unpunished would leave the scales of justice unbalanced, and it would be unfair to both the rest of the law-abiding members of society and to the victims of crimes.

In relation to retribution, many would argue that the concept does little to help victims or criminals. For instance, killing a murderer cannot bring back the life of the victim and would only result in the loss of another life. Further, many argue that victims should be encouraged to forgive and not exact retribution – the understanding being that forgiveness being closer to civility and revenge more closely related to barbarity.

Indeed, Islamic law (*Shariah*) addresses these and other concerns by giving the victim options: to forgive or to exact retribution. The Qur'an in fact

encourages the victim to forgive the wrongdoer for the benefit of both parties. However, in some instances victims and their family members can only feel pain as a result of the crime and see no solution except to exact revenge upon the criminal, or have the criminal pay for his crime in the form of financial compensation or through other means. In these instances the ideas of retribution and restitution seek to address the concerns of the victim and society at large. Not addressing this aspect of human social relations can result in injustices; today, certain legal systems are so lenient in their punishments that perpetrators of heinous crimes such as rape and child sexual abuse receive only a slap on their wrists, leaving victims tormented with the knowledge that their abusers remain unpunished while they must live with their suffering for the remainder of their lives.

Yet the Prophet, the Messenger of Mercy, did not leave the criminal himself out of the equation, and was concerned with the criminal's spiritual reformation. The criminal was often given a second chance, for if he repented after the first act and mended his ways, he may have been allowed to

go without punishment. In relation to the crime of fornication, the Qur'an states, "If they both repent and mend their ways, then leave them alone. Verily, God is acceptor of Repentance, the Merciful" (4:16).

Moreover, the punishment itself is seen as a form of spiritual purification for the criminal. Seen in this way, a criminal who is concerned about his spirituality and his life in the hereafter may even choose to be punished for his crimes.

The story of Maiz bin Malik is quite telling in this regard. Maiz committed adultery and came to the Prophet confessing to his crime and insisting on having himself purified by being punished, knowing fully-well the punishment for such a crime was stoning until death. The Prophet turned him away three times, and twice asked Maiz's tribe if Maiz was sane or if there was anything abnormal with him. They insisted he was sane and that he was one of their pious men. Only after Maiz insisted on being punished the fourth time and after the Prophet was assured that Maiz was sane was his request accepted.

In a similar incident, a woman who committed adultery requested to be punished, and like with Maiz the Prophet turned her away. Only after she insisted on being punished was the woman punished. Even then, the Prophet highly praised her extraordinary repentance, prayed for her, and buried her. This shows the high degree of moral consciousness the Prophet nourished in the hearts and minds of his followers. The Prophet never implemented punishments before the society in which they were to be applied was ready for it.

It should be noted that the Prophet's teachings with regard to criminal law was never meant to be applied without understanding the circumstances of the criminal. That is, the Prophet did not conclude that a given punishment is suitable in every circumstance.

The importance of context in applying corporeal punishment can be seen in the crime of theft. In any organized society, stealing is regarded as a punishable act. However, there may be instances when stealing can be understandable, and where the relevant punishment can be dispensed with. For example, during a period of famine in

the reign of Islam's second Caliph, Umar b. al-Khattab, the corporeal punishment for stealing, that is the amputation of the hand, was not applied since in those times of dearth and starvation, stealing could have been a crime of necessity rather than maliciousness.

Islamic punishments, especially those for adultery and theft are meant to be implemented only in an Islamic society where social justice and moral consciousness prevail and where there is no room left for the committing of crimes except as a result of human wickedness. The Prophet of Mercy never implemented even a single punishment in a context other than this.

It may be not out of place here to state that stoning to death as a punishment for adultery, while not practiced today by Jews and Christians, is commanded in the Torah, a scripture sacred to both religions.

Did Muhammad advocate the oppression and subjugation of women?

It is sometimes argued that the Prophet Muhammad advocated the oppression of women as shown in his actions and the principles that he taught his followers. Some ask: how can one dismiss the oppression of women as wrongful acts perpetrated by some misguided Muslims, when it was endorsed by the very Prophet of Islam? Further, since the Prophet Muhammad prescribed laws for women from the perspective of a man and the patriarchal, tribal society in which he lived, this would naturally lead to diminishing the status of women. Therefore, the argument goes, Islamic attitudes and laws should be viewed as outdated and in need of revision.

But is it really the case that the Prophet's teachings and practices endorse an oppressive way of life for women? Moreover, were his teachings based on his personal knowledge, experience or the conditions of the society in which he lived? Are Islamic attitudes toward women related to personal, social and historical conditions?

As stated in the Qur'an: "It is God who created you from a single person, and made its mate of like nature, in order that you might dwell with each other in mutual love" (7:189). This important verse expresses equality in the essence of both men and women. It is a principle that is grounded in an overarching view of humankind in Islam: that men and women are at the most fundamental level equal in the pursuit of ultimate happiness. While Islamic law takes for granted certain biological and social differences between men and women, this overarching view of gender equality is never sacrificed.

At the same time, the rules and regulations that apply to women that seem discriminatory from a modern perspective were not based on the Prophet's personal opinion or historical contingencies. Rather, Muslims believe that the Prophet was the conveyer of divine speech which carries far-reaching wisdom. Grasping aspects of God's wisdom requires learning, spiritual insight and experience. Thus, for a Muslim, it is not to be refuted simply because they run contrary to some modern sentiments.

It should be added that although there are biological and social differences between the genders, the Prophet's ethics connect man and woman in a very significant way: in their pursuit of good works. The two are meant to be agents of good and help one another in doing what is ultimately virtuous. The Qur'an not only endows women with the lofty ideals of attaining virtue and knowledge but also inextricably links the function of men with that of women; thus one gender is not privileged over another. In describing the relationship of a husband to his wife, the Qur'an says "you are a garment to her and she is a garment to you" (2:187). Both are to be mutually supportive in the pursuit of good.

The Prophet not only treated women fairly and equally but also raised her status in a society that treated women as a curse and as inferior. This was a society that buried alive newly born girls to protect a skewed view of honour.

Two critical instances demonstrate the care and rank he assigned to women. First, at the time of his death, when one would be concerned with the most significant of matters, the Prophet

strongly advised his companions to treat women gently and compassionately.

Another occasion was his farewell speech at Mount Nur, on his only Pilgrimage which was reportedly attended by one hundred and twenty thousand people. He purposely used that unique and rare occasion to instruct his companions to treat women fairly and compassionately, lest people go back to their old and unjust practices.

Hundreds of examples can be cited from his own life that show how he treated women compassionately and with utmost dignity and respect. He showed respect and dignity not only towards Muslim women but also non-Muslim women as well. Women from various backgrounds, race and colours found in him a refuge and a merciful protector. This claim can be substantiated by many incidents which are beyond the scope of this leaflet.

He taught them that “women are exactly like men.” This is an explicit statement from the Prophet proclaiming the equality of women and men in status and rank. Once a person came to the Prophet and asked, “Who deserves my best

rapport?” The Prophet replied, “Your mother”. The person repeated the question three times and the Prophet repeated the same answer. On the fourth time he said: “Your father.” To those unfamiliar with Arabic expression, the Prophet’s answering “your father” on the fourth occasion indicates the lofty status of motherhood over fatherhood, and the highly regarded status of women in Islam.

On another occasion he said “A believer must not hate a believing woman. If he does not like an aspect of her character, he should like another.”

Whenever his daughter Fatima would come to his home, he would stand to greet her, kiss her, and seat her in his place. Whenever he visited her she would do the same: stand up to greet him, kiss him and seat him in her place. Old women, slave girls, and women who many would consider unimportant were able to take his hand and go around the streets of Medina to fulfill some of their needs. In the Prophet they would always find a helping hand; such was his humbleness, tenderness and mercy towards women.

Hundreds of examples can be cited from his own life that show how he treated women compassionately and with the utmost dignity and respect. He showed respect and dignity not only towards Muslim women and women of his community, but also to non-Muslim women and outsiders alike. Women from various backgrounds, races and ages, found in him refuge and mercy.

Was Prophet Muhammad Anti-Semitic, and did he slaughter the men, women, and children of the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayza? Did he plan an ethnic cleansing of the Jewish people from the Arabian Peninsula?

The Prophet preached to the Jews and hoped and prayed for their salvation. He did not teach his followers to hate or exterminate the Jews. The incident at Banu Qurayza is often cited as the brutal murder of innocent Jews, but what is often left out is its historical context. The conflict was not about the Jewish faith but about a war that the tribe of Banu Qurayza had chosen to involve themselves in.

When the Prophet came to Medina he made a constitutional pact with the Jews who were a minority. They were afforded rights and freedoms which they enjoyed and for a time being they lived in peace. Muslims did not harm them.

To give an example, once a Jew and a Muslim quarreled. When the Jew praised Moses over the Prophet Muhammad the Muslim insulted the Jew. The Jew complained to the Prophet who said:

“Don’t confer on me superiority over Moses.” It was before this backdrop of religious coexistence that the incident of Banu Qurazya occurred.

The pact the Prophet Muhammad made with the Jews along with the other tribes in Medina was part of a written constitution that is considered to be one of history’s oldest. A whole section of the constitution pertained specifically to the Jews.

The main clauses of the constitution that dealt with Muslim-Jewish relations stated that Muslims and Jews must reside peacefully with one another and that they must not transgress against each other. The two were to both protect the city of Medina, and if there was to be any foreign aggression, everyone must defend the city together and share in the financial burden.

This peace treaty included the major Jewish tribes of Medina at that time: Banu Quraiza, Banu Nazir, and Banu Qaynuqa. While there were other Jewish tribes that lived with the Muslims in peace, these particular tribes did not abide by the treaty, and one after another, the three tribes breached the pact.

First, the Banu Nazir attempted to assassinate the Prophet, which led to a war between the Muslims and this tribe.

Second, Banu Qaynuqa breached the right of a Muslim woman by forcibly exposing her private parts while she was in the market. This led to another conflict between Muslims and Jews. Consequently both Jewish tribes were expelled from Medina, due to their violation of the treaty and constitution.

As for Banu Qurayza, not only did they breach the treaty, but they conspired with Meccan and other Arab tribes to launch an assault on Medina to wipe out the Muslims once and for all. Nowadays such actions would be categorized as treason and insurgency.

The Jews and their allies had an army of ten thousand as they marched towards Medina. The Prophet had only three thousand soldiers. The ensuing battle was called the “Battle of the Ditch” because the Muslims dug a trench around Medina as a defensive ploy.

Never did the Prophet face such a critical and alarming situation in all of his military experience. He even had to send Muslim women and children to the outskirts of Medina for their safety. The Muslims feared that the community would be exterminated.

The Qur'an depicts the situation: "Remember what you felt when they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when your eyes became dim and your hearts came up to your throats, and when most conflicting thoughts about God passed through your minds: for there and then were the believers tried, and shaken with a shock severe." (33:10)

Suddenly a storm wind blew violently, but strategically in favour of the Prophet and his army. Interminable strife and difficult climatic conditions eventually forced their enemies to leave. Admitting utter defeat, the Meccans and the other tribes left Medina. The Prophet immediately marched to Banu Qurazya. After a siege of almost one month, Banu Qurayza surrendered.

The Prophet Muhammad then had to deal with the 700 prisoners of war from Banu Qurayza.

He did not make any decision regarding them, but left it to an arbitrator, Sa'd bin Muadh, who was an ally of Banu Qurazya and the chief of a major Medinian tribe.

Sa'd took a pledge from both sides—the Prophet and the leaders of Banu Qurayza—that his verdict would be binding. Sa'd's final verdict was that those who fought against the Muslims should be killed, and that the women and children should be taken as prisoners. This judgment was applied in accordance with the voluntarily agreement of the Jews to be bound by the final verdict.

Banu Qurayza unfortunately faced this harsh punishment due to their very serious act of treason, which entirely undermined the fragile stability of the community. In fact, the Jews did not object to this judgment, as Sa'ad's decision was based on Jewish law, as expounded in the Torah:

When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labour and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engaged you in battle,

lay siege to that city. When the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. (Deuteronomy 20:10-16)

A Hindu writer, Nadhuran, after a detailed study of the historical account and the judgment made upon Banu Qurayza, concluded: "...though it seems harsh, Sa'd's verdict was fair. First, this verdict accorded with [the Jews'] own laws. Second, the verdict was made by a mediator who was their own ally and they themselves had chosen him to arbitrate between them and Muhammad."

The prolific author and scholar of comparative religions, Karen Armstrong, states "... It is, however, important to note that the Qurayzah were not killed on religious or racial grounds. None of the other Jewish tribes in the oasis either objected or attempted to intervene, clearly regarding it as a purely political and tribal matter... The men of Qurayzah were executed for treason. The seventeen other Jewish tribes of

Medina remained in the oasis, living on friendly terms with the Muslims for many years, and the Qur'an continued to insist that Muslims remember their spiritual kinship with the People of the Book..."

Therefore, it is clear from the detailed context of this incident that the charge of ethnic cleansing or genocide of the Jews of Medina is a baseless accusation.

Do Muslims attribute divinity to Muhammad?

Considering the pure and strict monotheism of Islam this question looks at the outset irrelevant and even absurd. But due to the fact that Muslims highly respect and venerate the Prophet, many non-Muslims, especially in the West, mistakenly believe that Muslims worship him. Indeed some of them have accused Muslims of believing that the Prophet is God.

The spectacular event that took place at his death is enough to put all questions related to this issue to rest. When the Prophet passed away, his companions, especially those close to him were reluctant to believe the news. One of the strongest among them who was later to become the second Caliph, Umar Bin Al-Khattab, not only rejected to accept the fact that the Prophet passed away, but even threatened to kill anyone who would spread this “rumour.” But the Prophet’s and Umar’s friend, Abu Bakr , after verifying the earthly demise of the Prophet stood up and declared in the firmest of words, “O people! If anyone of you worships Muhammad, Muhammad is dead. [But]

if anyone of you worships God, God is Alive and Immortal.”

Abu Bakr then recited the verse that had been revealed to the Prophet after the battle of Uhud, when many Muslims had been shocked by the false rumor of his death: “Muhammad is naught but a Messenger, Messengers had passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn upon your heels?” The verses made such an impact on the people that it was as though they were hearing them for the first time.

Before his death the Prophet cautioned his followers unequivocally that they should not worship or make idols of him like the followers of other Prophets did. He tirelessly educated them of his mortality and his being a man, except that he is the Messenger of God.

The Qur’an unequivocally states: “Say [O Prophet]: “I am but a mortal man like all of you” (18:110). The Qur’an repeats this point several times.

He prohibited building a place of worship on top of his grave. The Prophet in fact was buried in

his apartment, which was attached to the main mosque of Medina. It still remains attached to that same mosque, and while Muslims visit the mosque and pray in it, they only visit his grave and send benedictions upon him. They do not pray to him for any benefit because doing so is strictly forbidden in Islam.

Finally, it is pertinent to note that not a single Islamic sect considers Muhammad as God or worships him.

Is Muhammad's God Vengeful?

This is a misconception of the Prophet's teaching that is deeply set in Western attitudes toward Islam and one that has no basis whatsoever. The Prophet, who was sent as a mercy to all creation, taught his followers that God has many names which he has revealed to his creation. Of these, the Merciful and Beneficent are the most cited attributes in the Qur'an and two of the most important.

Every chapter (except one) in the Qur'an begins by the invocation: "In the name of God the Merciful, the Beneficent." In fact, the name "Merciful" (*al-Rahman*) as a name for God was not known to the Arabs when it was first revealed in the Qur'an. It was introduced to them by revelation and when they asked what it referred to, it was revealed: "Call upon Allah or Call upon *al-Rahman*. Whatever name you call upon, to Him belongs the most beautiful names" (17:110).

Moreover, the name "Merciful" is not just one of his many beautiful names; it holds a very important place in Islam. It is an established

principle in Islam that God's mercy overrides His wrath. Indeed, the Prophet has reported that God says, "My Mercy overcomes my Wrath." There are numerous verses and reports from the Prophet of Islam that establish the centrality of God's mercy and compassion. For example, the Prophet states that "Allah is compassionate and loves compassion. He provides for compassion in a way he does not for harshness."

In another report, the Prophet states, "Allah has one hundred portions of mercy and He has sent one to the world and divided it amongst his creation. So by it, they treat each other with compassion and mercy. He has held back 99 portions with Himself so that he may have mercy on his servants on the Day of Judgment."

The Qur'an has stated that the very sending of the Prophet Muhammad to the world was a mercy to all of creation. Indeed God's mercy not only pervades the cosmos, but it is also a fundamental legal and ethical principle in Islam. The scholars have shown that God's mercy is manifest in the legal rules that has been revealed to humanity.

One can also see mercy in the Prophet's teaching of the hereafter, that is heaven and hell. The very nature of hell as a place of human suffering and punishment is often cited as a reason to support the conclusion that God is vengeful. However, a closer analysis of the way heaven and hell is described in the Qur'an, as well as their purpose, will offer a glimpse of God's mercy even in the world to come.

When God describes heaven and hell in the Qur'an, the descriptions of hell are often very brief in comparison to those of heaven. For instance, chapter 55 of the holy Qur'an contains 22 beautiful and eloquently detailed verses regarding heaven while only 7 of its verses are concerned with hell.

Further, the Qur'an indicates that hell has not been created for arbitrary reasons. Rather, the Qur'an, while describing hellfire, often complements the descriptions with reasons as to why its dwellers ended up there in the first place.

In many places the reasons concern one's social behaviour, such as being uncharitable to the poor or unjustly exploiting people. It is interesting to note that many of these sins involve the

wrongdoer and other people, and are not just “sins against God.”

Therefore punishment and hellfire itself is related to justice, and by extension, God’s mercy. Should a merciful God allow for criminals to go unpunished? Should He allow for the wrongs perpetrated against victims to go unaddressed? Of course not! Therefore, hell and punishment is in itself a mercy to the victims of wrongdoing, and a necessary aspect of justice.

Keeping within the parameters of justice, the Prophet was clear to note that punishment will not take place until all the procedures of a fair trial are complete: records will be presented, witnesses will be called, even our eyes, ears and joints will give testimony. No one shall be wronged. Moreover, while God through His mercy will reward in great abundance those that are righteous to exponential degrees, He will not punish the wrongdoers except for their crimes and bad deeds – no more. The Qur’an states: “Whosoever shall come [before God] with a good deed will gain [further] good therefrom; but as for any who shall come with an evil deed – [know that] they who do evil deeds will

not be requited with more than [the like of] what they have done” (28:84).

Even while the Qur’an speaks about punishment and hellfire, it often concludes the statements with ideas of God’s mercy and forgiveness, usually mentioning that “He is the most Merciful, the Most Forgiving.” Even when addressing wrongdoers and criminals, God encourages them not to despair from His infinite Mercy and forgiveness. As God states: “O My servants! Those of you who have committed sins in great excess against their own souls never despond from the mercy of God! For indeed God forgives sins, one and all. Indeed it is He alone who is All-Forgiving, the Mercy-Giving” (39:53).

In this light, the Prophet’s teachings show that punishment can even be seen as a merciful action of God. There are Prophetic traditions that indicate that for many people entering hell, it would prove to become a mode of purification, whereby sinners will finally enter heaven after paying for their evil deeds. Without hell, it would be unjust for these people to enter heaven, and yet without hell, they could not have had the

opportunity to taste and appreciate heaven – again showing the merciful reasons behind God’s creation of hell.

Therefore, from the above, one can see that Prophet Muhammad’s teachings show God not to be vengeful, but Merciful and Compassionate, in this world and the next.

Did the Prophet suffer from Epilepsy?

The claims that the Prophet Muhammad suffered from epilepsy rests on a number of shaky assumptions not supported by medical research. They are based solely on the many different descriptions of his state during his reception of revelation. First, the Prophet first received revelation when he was forty years old. This would mean that the Prophet suddenly developed epilepsy later in life as it has never been reported that he suffered from such experiences before. This is highly unlikely from a medical perspective.

Moreover, epilepsy is seen as one way of explaining the Prophet's visions and spiritual experiences. The Prophet was not reported to have suffered from any such physical or mental conditions except during his reception of revelation. This would mean that the Prophet's epilepsy occurred only when he was inspired by verses from the Qur'an. This would be a medical anomaly as epilepsy is not consistently associated with such experiences.

Untreated epilepsy also leads to mental damage and difficulties. The Prophet Muhammad received revelation for 23 years and it was never reported that his memory or mental faculties suffered in any way.

If we consider the entire life history of the Prophet, one sees very clearly the integrity and consistency of his personality and qualities. He transformed the belief, practice and mindset of a corrupt and backward people to a moral and civilized one. He became the father of a nation in a manner unparalleled in human history.

From his family life to his public persona, the details of his life were transparent. And what emerges from a fair-minded look at his personality is that all his achievements cannot be reduced to some single medical reason. Unlike many of the great figures of history, what the Prophet did, said and sanctioned is recorded authentically and even more so after he received revelation. Indeed the thousands of pages that have been written on his life reveal not a trace of erratic or irrational behavior.

The idea of the Prophet being an epileptic was first advanced by Orientalists whose arguments both from a scientific and historical view are very flimsy. Since then, the argument has been rehashed by propagandists and critics who care little for the basis of their claims. From the above, it is clear that when one looks fairly at the life of the Prophet, it is hard to take such an argument seriously.