

The Farewell Address of the holy
Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h.
~ The Islamic Charter of Humanity ~

by Syed Mumtaz Ali

The Prophet Muhammad's (p.b.u.h.) Farewell Sermon
translated by Nuh Ha Mim Keller:

O people, hear me well: I explain to you. For I do not know; I may well not meet you again in this place where I now stand, after this year of mine.

O people: your lives and your property, until the very day you meet your Lord, are as inviolable to each other as the inviolability of this day you are now in, and the month you are now in. Have I given the message? -- O Allah, be my witness. So let whoever has been given something for safekeeping give it back to him who gave him it.

Truly, the usury of the Era of Ignorance has been laid aside forever, and the first usury I begin with is that which is due to my father's brother 'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib. And truly the blood-vengeance of the Era of Ignorance has been laid aside forever, and the first blood-vengeance we shall start with is that which is due for the blood of [my kinsman] 'Amir ibn Rabi'a ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib. Truly, the hereditary distinctions that were pretensions to respect in the Era of Ignorance have been laid aside forever, except for the custodianship of the Kaaba [by Bani 'Abd al-Dar] and the giving of drink to pilgrims [by al-'Abbas].

A deliberate murder is subject to retaliation in kind. An accidental death from a deliberate injury means a death

resulting from [something not usually used or intended as a deadly weapon such as] a stick or a rock, for which the indemnity is one hundred camels: whoever asks for more is a person of the Era of Ignorance.

O people: the Devil has despaired of ever being worshipped in this land of yours, though he is content to be obeyed in other works of yours, that you deem to be of little importance.

O people: postponing the inviolability of a sacred month [claiming to postpone the prohibition of killing in it to a subsequent month, so as to continue warring despite the sacred month's having arrived] is a surfeit of unbelief, by which those who disbelieve are led astray, making it lawful one year and unlawful in another, in order to match the number [of months] Allah has made inviolable. Time has verily come full turn, to how it was the day Allah created the heavens and the earth. Four months there are which are inviolable, three in a row and forth by itself: Dhul Qa'da, Dhul Hijja, and Muharram; and Rajab, which lies between Jumada and Sha'ban. Have I given the message? -- O Allah, be my witness.

O people: verily you owe your women their rights, and they owe you yours. They may not lay with another men in your beds, let anyone into your houses you do not want without your permission, or commit indecency. If they do, Allah has given you leave to debar them, send them from your beds, or [finally] strike them in a way that does no harm. But if they desist, and obey you, then you must provide for them and clothe them fittingly. The women who live with you are like captives, unable to

manage for themselves: you took them as a trust from Allah, and enjoyed their sex as lawful through a word [legal ruling] from Allah. So fear Allah in respect to women, and concern yourselves with their welfare. Have I given the message? -- O Allah, be my witness.

O people, believers are but brothers. No one may take his brother's property without his full consent. Have I given the message? -- O Allah, be my witness. Never go back to being unbelievers, smiting each other's necks, for verily, I have left among you that which if you take it, you will never stray after me: the Book of Allah. Have I given the message? -- O Allah, be my witness.

O people, your Lord is One, and your father is one: all of you are from Adam, and Adam was from the ground. The noblest of you in Allah's sight is the most godfearing: Arab has no merit over non-Arab other than godfearingness. Have I given the message? -- O Allah, be my witness.

-- At this, they said yes.

He said, Then let whomever is present tell whomever is absent.

O people:, Allah has apportioned to every deserving heir his share of the estate, and no deserving heir may accept a special bequest, and no special bequest may exceed a third of the estate. A child's lineage is that of the [husband who owns the] bed, and adulterers shall be stoned. Whoever claims to be the son of someone besides his father or a bondsman who claims to belong to other than his masters shall bear the curse of Allah and the angels and all men: no

deflecting of it or ransom for it shall be accepted from him. And peace be upon all of you, and the mercy of Allah.

Analysis

The Prophet gave a summary of his teachings in this address and we can analyse them under three main headings:

1. Reminder of the basic elements of the faith, namely: belief in the One God.
2. Rule of Law and Morality.
3. Rules of Justice.

I. Basic Belief in one God

(1) Monotheism, pure, simple, uncomplicated and unmixd is the foundation on which the Islamic system of belief is based.

- Only the invisible God, and none other, is worthy of worship and is worshipped without any icons or other material representation.
- He is capable of doing all things, although He is One. He is not only the creator, but also the master of all; hence the multiplicity of his attributes expressed by His ninety-nine beautiful names.
- The divine attributes or any of them do not stand by themselves and as such are not worshipped as independent entities as the idol-worshippers do.

(2) This conception of God differs according to individual thinking, e.g. a philosopher's understanding is not of the same level as that of a man in the street. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) admired

the fervour of the faith of simple people, and often gave the example of “the faith of old women” that is unshakable and full of sincere conviction. Certain mystics of early Islam have explained it in this way: “There is a truth about God known to the man in the street, another known to the initiated, yet another to the inspired prophets, and lastly, the one known to God Himself.

(3) So, while on the one hand, Muslims have nothing in common with atheists, polytheists, and others who associate others with the One God, on the other hand, on the authority of the Prophet of Islam, there is enough elasticity for satisfying the needs of different categories of man – learned, as well as ignorant; intelligent as well as simple, poets, artists, jurists, mystics, theologians and the rest. The point of view and the angle of vision may differ according to the individual, yet the object of vision remains constant.

- It was at Arafat that he, while sitting on his camel, delivered his sermon in a loud, clear voice to his people.
- Rabiah ibn Umayyah ibn Khalef repeated the sermon after him sentence by sentence and asked the people every now and then whether or not they had understood the Prophet's words and committed them to memory.

II The Rule of Law

1. The Qur'an and the conduct of the Prophet were to serve as the basics of law and a healthy criterion in every aspect of human life. *“I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and my Sunnah and if you follow these you will never go*

astray.”

2. Vendetta and private justice were abolished. The Prophet declared: *“Every right arising out of homicide in pre-Islamic days is henceforth waived and the first such right that I waive is that arising from the murder of Rabiah ibn al Harith ibn al Mutallib.”*

3. Equality of all believers without distinction of race orders. He stated: *“Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood.”*

Morality

No superiority of one over any other except by the individual excellence in the manner of piety and fear of God. Excellence of moral character to be the only criterion of individual superiority in the eyes of God. However, every person enjoyed equality in the eyes of the Law, and in the eyes of God, by reason of his being a member of the human race. The Prophet (pbuh) put it in these words: *“All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white - except by piety and good action.”*

III Justice

1. Basic Human Rights

Sacrosanct character of three fundamental rights of each and every human being concerning (a) his person (b) his property (c) his honour.

As to (a) his person, the Prophet declared: *“O People, just as you regard*

this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust . . . “Remember one day you will meet Allah and answer for your deeds.”

2. Economic Justice

(b) as to property, it was declared that constant redistribution and circulation of the private wealth of the nation (Ummah) and its accumulation, as a rule, was to be avoided by means of (1) prohibition of interest (2) obligatory inheritance and distribution of deceased persons property among near relatives of both sexes and (3) restrictions on wills (no more than 1/3 by way of legacy).

- Regarding interest, the prophet said: *“Allah has forbidden you to take usury (interest), therefore all interest obligations shall henceforth be waived. Your capital is yours to keep. You will neither inflict nor suffer any inequity. Allah has judged that there shall be no interest.”*
- As to the sacrosanct character of property, the Prophet further declared: *“O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners.”*

3. Domestic Justice. Better treatment of women:

The Farewell address puts it this way: *“O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women but they also have rights over*

you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right, then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with anyone of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste. O People, listen to me in earnest . . .”

The above analysis is from a talk which was delivered by Syed Mumtaz Ali in April of 1998