

# The Methodology of the Holy Prophet ﷺ for dealing with Societal Conflicts: A Research Based Study

**Dr. Muhammad Atif Aslam Rao**

Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Learning, University of Karachi, Karachi [dratifrao@uok.edu.pk](mailto:dratifrao@uok.edu.pk)

## Abstract

According to the last divine book of the Almighty God, the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the best for humanity. If believers are looking for success in this world and the hereafter, they must follow the pattern of Holy Prophet's life strictly in all aspects. The percept of his life is divinely approved for humanity. The glory of the life of Holy Prophet lies in the fact that it is not restricted to a particular period, any specific region or religious belief, rather it encompasses all the facets of human life. Indeed, the purest and comprehensive roadmap for managing the conflicts and differences is present in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. This paper is aimed and focused on highlighting the traits of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him, in settling the disputes, conflicts and divergences in the society. This paper will attempt to answer the following queries.

1. What lesson can humanity learn from the life of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him for dealing with conflicts?
2. How did he earn goodwill and reputation in spite of living in cruel and hostile society?
3. What was his attitude while dealing with disputes and conflicts?

**Keywords:** Conflicts, Settlements, Dispute, Hostile, Religion

Instead of discussing the details of the differences found in the societies, this article will focus on the remedial measures for the positivity and prosperity of the societies. Hence, looking into the remedial measures for the conflicts in communities, we find the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ is the best example and model. As said in the Holy Quran,

<sup>1</sup>"لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا"

"Certainly you have an excellent example in the following of the Messenger of Allah, for him who hopes in Allah and the Last Day, and (who) remembers Allah in abundance"<sup>2</sup>

Hence, the guidance of the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ does not restrict itself to the period of his lifetime alone, any specified region or any particular nation. Rather, it is the best model for all societies and for all times. It provides thorough guidelines for individual life and the societal issues alike. Thus, the most practical, and the most comprehensive road map for handling the societal conflicts and differences is present in the examples and teachings of the Last Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The subsequent discussions will focus on the traits of Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ for rectifying conflicts in the society. Besides, it will show their relevancy and practicality in our contemporary issues.

### **The Three Primary Concepts from the Holy Quran**

Prior the detailed discourse of conflicts and divergences in the society with its remedial measures by the Holy Prophet ﷺ, it seems appropriate to cite the respective three elementary concepts from the Holy Quran.

#### **i. Existence of Differences in Societies**

It is destined by Allah that differences are to exist in the society. There will forever be different political orientations, beliefs, and thinking's in the guilds. It is the Will of Allah. He always wills out of His infinite wisdom, whether we realise it or not. It is stated in the Holy Quran:

"وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَرَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ"<sup>3</sup>

"And had your Lord willed, He would have made mankind, one nation – and they will always keep differing"<sup>4</sup>

It is our cardinal belief that no one can intervene in the Will of Allah. So, having understood this reality, we must stop forming illusions to make all members of the society accept our ideology blindly and thoroughly. Everyone must find out to get along with the people of a different mindset. Each of us should have enough room in his mind to accommodate the diversity of the society.

#### **ii. Freedom of Choice**

It is the Islamic belief that the existence of different religion in humanity is the Wisdom and Will of Almighty Allah. Moreover, Allah has given complete

freedom and choice to His creation in this respect. It is clearly written in the Holy Quran:

"فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ"<sup>5</sup>

"So whoever wills may accept faith, and whoever wills may disbelieve"<sup>6</sup>

The above verse gives the right to everyone to accept Islam out of his understanding and wisdom. For this, Almighty Allah has endowed enough intellect to each individual of the world. Therefore, it is unlawful and illogical to force others to accept Islam against their will. The same rationale applies regarding differences and conflicts of society. Arguments should be described. Nevertheless, they should not be forcefully prescribed.

### iii. Dignity of Humanity

Aside from religious belief, race or gender, all humans are honoured, respectable and deserve mercy. The Holy Quran states:

"وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ"<sup>7</sup>

"Indeed We have honoured the Descendants of Adam"<sup>8</sup>

Hazrat Jabir bin Abdullah reports that a funeral bier passed by the Holy Prophet ﷺ, he stood up in respect. Companions said to Holy Prophet ﷺ, "Ya Rasoolallah ﷺ! It is a Jew's funeral." The Holy Prophet ﷺ replied, "Aren't they human?"

The conduct of the Holy Prophet ﷺ view describes that every human deserves respect and courtesy. The same is the teachings of the Holy Quran for all believers.

### Traits of the Holy Prophet ﷺ in dealing with conflicts

#### 1. Graduality (*shaping*)

It has now become a common behaviour that when people find someone with some conflicts or contradictory notions, they start bombarding a shower of arguments, historical facts, logics and make so many other attempts to get him forsake his existing attitude, belief or notion and adopt the 'right' track. However, in the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, we see that Arabs were involved in many atrocious activities which were very harmful to themselves and for the entire society. Their false beliefs and wrong notions led to adopt some habits and qualities which engulfed their lifestyle and overall behaviour of the

society. They were so much involved in these activities that it was nearly impossible to change their malicious attitude at once. So, the Holy Prophet ﷺ attempted to reform the attitude and behaviour of the entire Arabia in a gradual process. It did not happen that the Arabs left all their habits and activities just after a single order; nevertheless, it took a certain period and a stepwise series of injunctions to make them avoid all vices. The scientific discipline of psychology also describes that a great deal of our behaviour is learned and maintained because it is regularly reinforced.<sup>9</sup> Psychologists elaborate that a full-fledged behaviour management program has a series of levels, each requiring increasingly novel behaviour. For instance, patients might at first be given some gifts for merely attending group therapy sessions. Once this behaviour is established, they would be rewarded only for actually participating in the sessions. Eventually, the process of giving gifts could be discontinued when the patient receives the reinforcement of being helped by participation in the therapy sessions. Here patients are not at once compelled to participate in the sessions. However, they are gradually made to participate in the sessions by stepwise reinforcement. This whole phenomenon is known as shaping which is recommended to be employed for the change in behaviour.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, you might first give a child a treat whenever he greets you with Salam. Side by side, you might reinforce to shake hands as well. Eventually, you would require that the child greets and shakes hands with you in proper sequence before giving the treat. Each step in shaping, moving slightly beyond the previously learned behaviour, allows the person to associate the new step to the behaviour previously learned.

We find the best application of shaping in curing the varied attitudes and behaviours of Arabs. The practice of drinking alcohol and playing gambling were the integral portion of the Arab society before Islam. No celebration or festival was considered complete without alcohol. Those who abstained and avoided gambling were termed as niggardly and cowards. Both these practices were so deeply rooted in the temperaments of the Arabs that to expel them from their system was almost beyond imagination.

Therefore, the Holy Prophet ﷺ (as per the revelations of Allah) took a pragmatic and measured approach in the matter of alcohol and gambling to prepare the ground for smoother adoption and implementation. So, quite wisely, at first, gambling and drinking were declared that there are some benefits, but the sins thereof outweigh the benefits. The harm is comparatively much more.

"يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِن نَّفْعِهِمَا"<sup>11</sup>

"They ask you the decree regarding Wine (intoxicants) and gambling; say (O dear Prophet Mohammed ﷺ), In both is a great sin, and some worldly benefit for men – but their sin is greater than their benefit"<sup>12</sup>

This statement was the initiatory measure towards a universal ban on drinking and gambling in Muslim society. Some people were already not very fond of these vices and the others gave them up after being admonished.<sup>13</sup> It was the first step to raising in people's minds an inner consciousness of their harmful effects, advising that they would be better avoided.

The second step came later on, and the Muslims were prevented from offering their prayers when in a state of intoxication.

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقْرَبُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنْتُمْ سُكَرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعْلَمُوا مَا تَقُولُونَ"<sup>14</sup>

"O believers, draw not near to prayer when you are drunken until you know what you are saying,"<sup>15</sup>

The companions got an alert that when the supreme worship, prayer cannot be performed in this state, there can be nothing good about it. Sayyid Qutb in his commentary, 'Fi Zilal al-Qur'an' says,

"There are five prayers to be performed at set times every day. The time interval between one prayer and the next is not long enough for a drinking person to regain sobriety. This (order) restricts the opportunity to drink and helps habitual drinkers to give it up altogether"<sup>16</sup>

Subsequently, the third and last step in banning drinking came declaring total prohibition of alcohol,

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ. إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلَاةِ ۚ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ"<sup>17</sup>

"O believers, wine, and arrow-shuffling, idols and divining arrows are an abomination, some of Satan's work; so avoid it; So you will prosper. Satan only desires to precipitate enmity and hatred between you regarding wine and arrow-shuffling and to bar you from the remembrance of God, and from prayer. Will you then desist?"<sup>18</sup>

After the revelation of the above verses, all the Muslims renounced alcohol completely. The liquor was poured down the drain, in that it began to flow in the lanes. Whenever it rained even after years, the colour of alcohol would appear on the surface together with its stench.<sup>19</sup>

They were so much prepared and ready to adopt this instruction that Ameer Muhammad Akram Awan in his commentary, 'Asrar At-Tanzil' writes,

"The Holy Prophet ﷺ commanded that anyone possessing alcohol should deposit it at a given place. The companions immediately complied. He went there and cut open some of the leather containers personally while ordering the companions to waste the rest. One of the companions used to import wine had gone to Syria to buy it with all his savings. On his return, he asked for the Holy Prophet ﷺ word, who said that all the wine was to be wasted away by cutting open the containers. He spilt all his investment without the least hesitation"<sup>20</sup>

So, applying the revealed gradual pattern of instruction (operant conditioning of shaping), the Holy Prophet ﷺ made people not only denounce alcohol, but also accept its prohibition from the core of their hearts. Hence, an unwanted order smoothly complied through graduality.

Similarly, it is also well known that interest was widely practised in Makkah. The influential class of the Arabs consists capitalists and moneylenders. In other words, they were traders and usurers. The rates of interest which they charged on loans were too exorbitant. Moneylenders usually took a dinar for a dinar, in other words, 100 percent interest. Many of them were professional usurers; they lived on the interest they charged on their loans. It was so common that many a Makkan who had only a modest income would resort to usurers; despite the high interest to participate in the profitable caravan trade with a hope to get benefit after the safe return of the caravan.<sup>21</sup>

This economic situation created many economic and social troubles. It damaged the income distribution amongst the poor and harmed the social order as well. This condition tragically hurt the poor farmers, craftsmen and jobless people in particular. They had to borrow money and capital with usury. When they could not repay their debts, they had to accept to become slaves of their payees. Some debtors would kill their daughters so that they would not be female slaves and subject of shameful applications from payees.<sup>22</sup>

As interest is one of the most merciless unjust incomes and a means whereby payee exploited their debtors in need, it was necessary to abolish its practice. So, the Holy Prophet attempted to forbid all kinds of usury unlawful. However,

it was not made forbidden abruptly, but in a gradual way. Again, we see that the Holy Prophet applied the operant technique of shaping to bring change in the behaviour of Arabs in this context too.

Analytical study of the Holy Qur'an shows that there are four sets of verses which were revealed on different occasions regarding usury. Firstly, in Surah Al-Rum Allah condemns interest (Riba) as,

"وَمَا آتَيْتُمْ مِّن رِّبَا لِّيَرْبُوَ فِي أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ فَلَا يَرْبُوا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ؛ وَمَا آتَيْتُمْ مِّن زَكَاةٍ تُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ  
بِئْسَ الْمُضْعِفُونَ"<sup>23</sup>

"And that which you give upon usury, in order that it may increase the creditors' property, will not increase before Allah; and the charity you give seeking the pleasure of Allah – only that will increase manifold"<sup>24</sup>

Surah Al-Room was indisputably revealed in Makkah. It is apparent that this verse is not of prohibitive nature. It tells that interest does not increase with Allah, which means it carries no reward in the Hereafter. There is no specific prohibition of interest in the verse. However, it emphasises that interest carries no reward from Allah in the Hereafter. Therefore, this verse does not contain a prohibition against interest. Nevertheless, it may be taken as a subtle indication of the fact that Allah does not favour the practice.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to interest, Allah presents virtue of giving charity expecting no favours from anyone, but seeking only God's pleasure as an alternative and a guaranteed means of increasing money. It was the founding stone in the course of the prohibition of interest.

Afterwards, Allah revealed a verse in Surah Al-Nisa where interest is described in the context of the sinful acts of the Jews,

"وَ أَخَذِهِمُ الرِّبَا وَقَدْ نُهُوا عَنْهُ وَأَكْلِهِمْ أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِالْبَطْلِ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ مِنْهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا"<sup>26</sup>

"And because they used to take usury whereas they were forbidden from it, and they used to devour people's wealth wrongfully; and for the disbelievers among them, We have kept prepared a painful punishment"<sup>27</sup>

In this verse, it is observed that Jews used to take interest which was forbidden for them. The context in which the verse was revealed suggests that it would have been revealed before the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Hijra when Jews were abundantly present in Madinah. Since most of the Jews had left Madinah after the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Hijra, this verse seems to have been revealed before that. This verse

cannot be taken as a direct and explicit prohibition of interest for the Muslims. It simply mentions that interest was forbidden for the Jews, but they did not comply with the prohibition in their practical lives. The inference, though, would be that it was a sinful act for the Muslims also. Otherwise, they had no occasion to blame them for the practice<sup>28</sup>

In Psychological context, it was the process of shaping that people were gradually made to churn up the practice of interest as it is harmful, physically or spiritually. First, it was declared that it bears no reward, i.e. Allah dislikes it, then after referring Jews it was notified that usury was forbidden for the previous nations. Then later, in the third step a verse in this context was revealed in Surah Al-Imran and the prohibition of interest is laid down,

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا الرِّبَا أَضْعَافًا مُضَاعَفَةً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ"<sup>29</sup>

"O People who believe! Do not devour usury doubling and quadrupling it; and fear Allah, hoping that you achieve success"<sup>30</sup>

The above verse of Surah Al-Imran is estimated to have been revealed sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year after Hijra because the context of the preceding and succeeding verses refers to the battle of Uhud which place after the 2nd year of Hijra. This verse contains a clear prohibition for the Muslims, and it can safely be said that it is the first verse of the Holy Qur'an through which the practice of interest was forbidden for the Muslims in express terms. Some commentators have also pointed out the reason why this verse was revealed in the context of the battle of Uhad. They say that the invaders of Makkah had financed their army by taking usurious loans and had in this way arranged a lot of arms against Muslims. It was apprehended that it may induce the Muslims to arrange for arms on the same pattern by taking usurious loans from the citizenry. To prevent them from the approach, the verse was revealed containing a clear-cut prohibition of Riba.<sup>31</sup>

The fourth set of verses is found in the Surah Al-Baqara where the severity of the prohibition of interest has been elaborated in detail,

"الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ الرِّبَا لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ الَّذِي يَتَخَبَّطُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ مِنَ الْمَسِّ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا الْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ الرِّبَا وَأَحَلَّ اللَّهُ الْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ الرِّبَا فَمَنْ جَاءَهُ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَانْتَهَى فَلَهُ مَا سَلَفَ وَأَمْرُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَمَنْ عَادَ فَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ بُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ. يَمْحَقُ اللَّهُ الرِّبَا وَيُزِيلُ الصِّدْقَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ. إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ يُرِيدُونَ وَعِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ. يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَذَرُّوا مَا بَقِيَ مِنَ الرِّبَا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ. فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْذَنُوا بِحَرْبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ

وَرَسُولِهِ وَاِنْ تُبْتُمْ فَلَكُمْ رُءُوسُ اَمْوَالِكُمْ لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظْلَمُونَ. وَاِنْ كَانَ ذُو عُسْرَةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ  
 اِلَى مِيسِرَةٍ وَاَنْ تَصَدَّقُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ. وَاَتَقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ اِلَى اللّٰهِ \* ثُمَّ  
 تُؤَفَّفَى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ<sup>32</sup>

"Those who devour usury will not stand up on the Day of Judgement, except like the one whom an evil jinn has deranged by his touch; that is because they said, 'Trade is also like usury!'; whereas Allah has made trading lawful and forbidden usury; for one to whom the guidance has come from his Lord, and he refrained therefrom, is lawful what he has taken in the past; and his affair is with Allah; and whoever continues earning it henceforth, is of the people of Fire; they will remain in it for ages. Allah destroys usury and increases charity; and Allah does not like any ungrateful, excessive sinner. Indeed those who believed and did good deeds and kept the prayer established and paid the charity – their reward is with their Lord; and there shall be no fear upon them nor shall they grieve. O People who believe! Fear Allah and forego the remaining usury, if you are Muslims. And if you do not, then be certain of a war with Allah and His Noble Messenger; and if you repent, take back your principal amount; neither you cause harm to someone, nor you be harmed. And if the debtor is in difficulty, give him respite till the time of ease; and your foregoing the entire debt from him is still better for you, if only you realise. And fear the day in which you will be returned to Allah, and every soul will be paid back in full what it had earned, and they will not be wronged"<sup>33</sup>

The study of the verses of the Holy Qur'an in the light of their historical background clearly proves that Riba was prohibited at least in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Hijra. In fact, it was prohibited from the very beginning, but the severity of prohibition was not emphasised during that period because Muslims were being persecuted by the infidels of Makkah and their major focus was on establishing the basic articles of faith and they had no occasion to indulge in the practice of Riba.<sup>34</sup>

So, we observe that applying the operant conditioning of shaping, the Holy Prophet succeeded in the eradication of the abominable practice of usury through a complete campaign of Divine revelations. Thus, usury was made forbidden for those who were deeply involved in this practice quite successfully.

Likewise, the widowhood in pre-Islamic age was barbaric, inhumane and savagely brutal. After the decease of the husband, the widow was kicked out of

the house and was forced to live in a little shack, which was dark with very poor air circulation, for the time duration of a year. This ‘waiting period’ was called the *Iddat*. She was not permitted to leave the hut, nor was she allowed to take a bath or change clothes. After one year, she was allowed to come out of the hut. People would heave camel excrement at her lap and asked her to rub her body against the body of an animal. Then she was forced to go round the village in the same dirty attire, throwing the camel dung on her right and her left. This was the indication that she had completed her *Iddat*.<sup>35</sup>

Again, the Holy Prophet ﷺ abolished this inhumane and painfully cruel practice. Applying the operant condition of shaping, he abrogated this malicious custom of *Iddat* in two steps. In the first step duration of the waiting period remained same as Arabs were accustomed to it and it was very hard to change the overall pattern of *Iddat* abruptly. So, quite psychologically, the first order did not change the period of *Iddat*. However, the respective ethics and morals were emphasised.

"وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا وَصِيَّةً لِّأَزْوَاجِهِمْ مَّتَاعًا إِلَى الْحَوْلِ غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍ فَإِنْ خَرَجْنَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي مَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ مِنْ مَّعْرُوفٍ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ"<sup>36</sup>

"And those of you who die leaving wives behind them – they should bequeath for their wives a complete provision for one full year without turning them out; so if they go out themselves, there is no sin on you regarding what they do of themselves in a reasonable manner; and Allah is Almighty, Wise"<sup>37</sup>

This order was the first successful step by the Holy Prophet ﷺ of the shaping process to attain the final goal response. The women of the Arabian society were to be relieved from the cruelty of the prevalent *Iddat*. For this, the system of *Iddat* was refined regarding its application later on its period was also shortened for the ease of women. Almighty Allah states in Surah Al-Baqara,

"وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا يَتَرَبِّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ"<sup>38</sup>

"And those among you who die leaving wives behind them, then such widows shall restrain themselves for four months and ten days; so when their term is completed, O guardians of such women, there is no sin on you in what the women may decide for themselves in accordance with Islamic law; and Allah is Well-Aware of what you do"<sup>39</sup>

So, through the gradual process of shaping, the Holy Prophet ﷺ reinforced the Arab nation for the change in their attitude towards a widow in two successful steps. It finally presented a refined program of Iddat which says of four months and ten days.

This graduality was the trait through which the Holy Prophet ﷺ brought the behavioural revival in Arabs by the gradual revelations. Issues which required to be addressed at once were stated instantly with immediate effects such as matters of beliefs and faith. However, to bring change in their behaviour and attitude, the Holy Qur'an adopted the psychological trait of shaping which brought in very positive results, and the world witnessed that those who were involved so deeply in immoral habits and inhumane practices changed their position altogether and came up as leaders of piety and goodness. And gradually the Holy Prophet ﷺ eliminated all evils and vices of the society and presented an alternative arrangement of living which is the best-known way of life for a prosperous society.

Following this guidance of the Holy Prophet ﷺ can do wonders in our all conflicting society. Step by step dealing with the contradicting thoughts, develops confidence and trust upon each other, and ultimately it leads towards a happy ending.

## **2. Foot-In-The-Door Phenomenon**

The second trait we learn from the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ for reducing the differences and establishing harmony is the Foot-in-the-door technique, in which going along with small requests may result in compliance with subsequent, much larger requests (Gilbert, 1981).<sup>40</sup> Myers defines this phenomenon as the tendency for people who have first agreed to a small request to comply later with a larger request. A door-to-door salesperson soon learns that if she can get the customer to comply with her request to let her in the door, the customer is more likely to comply with a later request to buy the product.<sup>41</sup>

The foot-in-the-door technique refers to the increased probability of compliance to a second request if a person complies with a small, first request. Therefore, this technique is described as a compliance tactic that involves getting a person to agree to a large request by first setting them up by having that person agree to a modest request.<sup>42</sup>

Essentially, the more a person goes along with small requests or commitments, the more likely he is to continue in the desired direction of attitude or behavioural change and feel obligated to go along with larger requests.<sup>43</sup> The principle involved is that a small agreement creates a bond between the

requester and the requested. Even though the requested may only have agreed to a trivial request out of politeness, this forms a bond which - when the requested attempts to justify the decision to themselves - may be mistaken for a genuine affinity with the requester, or an interest in the subject of the request. When a future request is made, the requested will feel obliged to act consistently with the earlier one.<sup>44</sup> For example, if you want someone to give you five hours of his time a week for the four months as a volunteer to a charity (a larger request). To get him to agree to this larger request, you first ask him to volunteer for one hour of his time and one time only. After hearing this small request, which he is willing to agree to, you then work your way up asking him to volunteer time until he is willing to agree to the big request. He is more likely to agree to this when he has already said yes to the small request. A review of fifteen years of research on the foot-in-the-door technique indicates that it works well in persuading people to comply and that it does occur often.<sup>45</sup>

In one of the first demonstrations of this phenomenon, housewives were asked to put up a small sign in one of their windows or to sign a petition. Two weeks later, they were asked to put up a large, ugly sign on their front lawns. Results showed that significantly more women complied with the second request if they had been previously approached and had complied with the first request.

The essence of the above discussion is that 'obedience' is a crucial and significant factor of for the behaviour change. Psychologists consider it as a basic and a requirement for all communal living. Psychological experiments prove that people have a natural tendency for obedience. Psychologists also describe that people tend to comply more readily with a large request if they have already agreed to a small favour. This technique is called foot-in-the-door technique, and it is used to get compliance from others (to get them to behave in a way you want) in which a small request is made first to get compliance with a larger request. It is claimed that this technique is found fruitful and successful mostly.

Therefore, to bring radical change in the entire society, the Holy Qur'an emphasises on the obedience of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. However, quite psychologically, the mode of revelation from Almighty Allah is not abrupt and rigorous at first. Primarily, the Holy Qur'an highlights the importance of obedience and heeding the advices. Allah praises those who listen to good words and obey them as,

"الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ. أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ بَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ أَوْلُوا الْأَلْبَابِ"<sup>46</sup>

"Those who heed attentively and follow the best from it; it is these whom Allah has guided, and it is these who have intelligence"<sup>47</sup>

In the above verse, the Holy Qur'an categorically describes the distinctive quality of successful people for whom Allah declared glad tidings of Paradise.

In this connection, the Holy Qur'an draws the attention of humanity towards the glorious personality of the Holy Prophet ﷺ a personality who provided shelter for the Muslims during the period of worries and terror. He was the one who stayed firm despite the difficulties. Without any shadow of a doubt, the personality of the Holy Prophet ﷺ is the source of hope, confidence and reassurance for humanity. It is said in the Holy Qur'an,

"لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا"<sup>48</sup>

"Indeed following the Noble Messenger of Allah is better for you, for one who is confident of Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much"<sup>49</sup>

The Holy Qur'an describes obedience of the Holy Prophet ﷺ as the essence of faith and submission. Uttering mere verbal claim alone is not recognised as the True love of Allah and faith. The Holy Qur'an guides that the passion and claim of loving Almighty Allah must be affirmed with a conscious obedience of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and its implementation in the course of life. It is stated in Surah Aal-e-Imran that to be a true believer is not to repeat certain words or to experience certain feelings or to observe certain rituals. True faith is total obedience to Almighty Allah and His Messenger ﷺ.<sup>50</sup>

"قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ. قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكٰفِرِينَ"<sup>51</sup>

"Proclaim, (O dear Prophet Mohammed ﷺ) O mankind! If you love Allah, follow me Allah will love you and forgive you your sins'; and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Proclaim, 'Obey Allah and the Noble Messenger'; so if they turn away – then Allah is not pleased with the disbelievers"<sup>52</sup>

Sayyid Qutb quotes Imam Ibn Kathir in the commentary of the above verses which says that this verse gives a verdict in the case of anyone who claims to love God but does not follow the way of life laid down by the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. His very claim is an absolute lie unless he follows the Muhammadan legislation in all his actions and statements. Also, in commentary on the verse, "Say: 'Obey God and the Messenger.' If they turn then backs, God does not love the unbelievers," Imam Ibn Kathir says this

verse indicates that to disobey Holy Prophet ﷺ is to reject the faith. God does not love anyone who may be described as an unbeliever, even though he may claim to love God.<sup>53</sup>

Having explained obedience of the Holy Prophet ﷺ as the basis of faith and his disobedience is meant for the rejection of faith and a sign of disbelief, the Holy Qur'an highlights the status of his obedience and its worth in Islam.

"مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ ۗ وَمَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ فَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا"<sup>54</sup>

"Whoever obeys the Noble Messenger has indeed obeyed Allah, and for those who turn away – We have not sent you as their savior"<sup>55</sup>

In the above verse, the Holy Qur'an emphasises on the obedience of the Holy Prophet ﷺ throughout the life to the extent that it is parallel to the obedience of Almighty Allah.

This verse outlines the basic rule to which all matters in Islam are referred: obedience to God and His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, i.e., a submission which leaves no room except for absolute obedience and total compliance in all affairs of life.

In this connection, adopting the methodology of the foot-in-the-door technique of psychology, the Holy Qur'an suggests that it is better for the believers to consult and look towards the Holy Prophet's guidance for the solution of all their disputes and conflicts. This is the best for themselves.

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَ أُولَى الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ ۗ فَإِنْ تَنَزَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ۗ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا"<sup>56</sup>

"O People who Believe! Obey Allah and the Noble Messenger and those amongst you who are in authority; so if there is a dispute amongst you concerning any matter, refer it to Allah and the Noble Messenger (for judgment) if you believe in Allah and the Last Day; this is better and has the best outcome"<sup>57</sup>

Believers are directed to obey God and to obey His Prophet ﷺ. Thus, obedience to the Holy Prophet ﷺ is obeying Almighty Allah. Mufti Ahmad Yaar Khan Badayuni, in commentary on the above verse, says that the obedience to the Holy Prophet ﷺ is incumbent under all circumstances. If any differences take place, the solution should be sought through a categorical

guidance from the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Moreover, from this verse, we learn that Faith is the claim and actions are the proof thereof. Whoever merely makes a verbal claim of believing in Allah Almighty and His Holy Prophet ﷺ, but in deeds behaves like the infidels, the claim of such a person is baseless and without any proof.<sup>58</sup>

Now came the moment when Allah asked for a larger demand from the believers that once the order of the Holy Prophet ﷺ has come, no one has right to argue but to follow it. According to the foot-in-the-door technique of psychology, as people had developed the significance of the obedience in their mind and they had also understood the worth and necessity of the obedience of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, they were more ready to accept the decisions and instructions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ in all affairs of their life. Therefore, now it is said in Surah Al-Ahzab,

"وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا لِمُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ. وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا"<sup>59</sup>

"And no Muslim man or woman has any right in the affair when Allah and His Noble Messenger have decreed a command regarding it; and whoever does not obey the command of Allah and His Noble Messenger, has indeed clearly gone very astray"<sup>60</sup>

The above verse of the Holy Qur'an represents an element of organising the nation on Islamic teachings, emphasising the obedience of Almighty Allah and His Noble Prophet ﷺ in particular. The Holy Qur'an stresses the Muslims' bond and attachment with the Holy Prophet ﷺ and clarifies his role in their society. A law is declared that Allah and the Holy Prophet ﷺ have complete authority over the Muslims' lives. Once they order, a Muslim must carry it out. Apart from the context in which this verse was revealed, this statement of the Holy Qur'an outlines a general rule which has a deep and a thoughtful effect on believers' lives.

When this component of the Islamic belief had been constituted amongst Muslims, they submitted themselves wholly to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, leaving nothing for themselves. They willingly accepted everything God and His Messenger ﷺ willed for them. Thus, they surrendered themselves truly and entirely to Almighty Allah and His Messenger ﷺ." In fact, when this basic element of Islamic faith found its root in the hearts of the first Muslim

community, it produced plentiful and sweet fruit in a very short period of time"<sup>61</sup>

As described in the foot-in-the-door phenomenon of psychology, it was now possible to ask people to sacrifice everything in obedience of the Holy Prophet ﷺ even their lives. Hence, very rightly and timely the Holy Qur'an instructs believers,

"فَتِلُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّى يُعْطُوا الْجِزْيَةَ عَنْ يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ"<sup>62</sup>

"Fight against the People given the Book(s) who do not accept faith in Allah and the Last Day, and who do not treat as forbidden what is forbidden by Allah and by His Noble Messenger, and who do not follow the true religion, until they pay the tariff with their hands with humiliation"<sup>63</sup>

We see that people gave their lives, and submitted their wealth and property willingly. The Holy Qur'an indicates them,

"إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَ جَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ - أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ"<sup>64</sup>

"The true believers are only those who accepted faith in Allah and His Noble Messenger and then did not have any doubt, and fought with their wealth and their lives in Allah's way; it is they who are truthful"<sup>65</sup>

That was the result of the charismatic leadership of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the wise strategy of reforming. We see that the Holy Qur'an adopted foot-in-the-door phenomenon of obedience, which is a persuasion technique to gain initial trust first prior asking big favours in the future. Psychologists suggest that if you want to get someone to do you a big favour, test the waters first by requesting small things. Research has proven that people will more likely agree to do complicated tasks assigned to them after they have previously agreed to do the simpler ones. The same was practised by the Holy Qur'an. First of all, people were made conscious of the worth and excellence of the Prophet's obedience. Then gradually the level of obedience increased till it was said that people had no right to decide their issues themselves, but through the guidance of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

History proves that people readily believed and followed the Qur'anic injunction because once people make a commitment; they are more likely to follow through with the bigger responsibilities. This is the Divine example set for the behaviour modification.

Thus, in our home, workplace and community sometimes shaping and at times foot in the door technique is required for dealing with conflicts and differences. In short, if you want others to adopt a positive and true thought, we need, to begin with, some unanimous notions first, and gradually we should move towards some firm ideology even if it is entirely different and alien to his previous belief. The life of the Holy Prophet proves that we will succeed in the elimination of contradictions and differences.

### Notes & References

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Note: This paper was presented in International Conference, organized by Department of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Karachi with collaboration of HEC on 09-10<sup>th</sup> November, 2017.

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