

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

by Syed Mumtaz Ali

The following is the Farewell Address of the holy Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. This sermon was delivered on the Ninth Day of Dhul-Hijjah 10 A.H. in the 'Uranah valley of Mount Arafat' in Mecca.:

After praising and thanking Allah the Prophet (s.a.w.s. said:

"O People, lend me an attentive ear, for I know not whether after this year I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying very carefully and take these words to those who could not be present here today.

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. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that he will indeed reckon your deeds. 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 and that all the interest due to Abbas ibn 'Abd'al [the Prophet's uncle] be waived.

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 Rabi'ah ibn al Harith ibn al Muttalib.

O People, the unbelievers indulge in tampering with the calendar in order to make permissible that which Allah forbade, and to forbid that which Allah has made permissible. With Allah the months are twelve in number. Four of them are holy, three of these are successive and one occurs singly between the months of Jumada and Shaban.

Beware of Satan, for the safety of your religion. He has lost all hope of that he will be able to lead you astray in big things, so beware of following him in small things.

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, worship Allah, say your five daily prayers, fast during the month of Ramadhan, and give your wealth in Zakat. Perform Hajj if you can afford to.

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. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not therefore do injustice to yourselves. Remember one day you will meet Allah and answer your deeds. So beware: do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone.

O People, no prophet or apostle will come after me, and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand my words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and my Sunnah and if you follow these you will never go astray.

All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed Your message to Your people."

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 unmixed 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 worshiped 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 worshiped 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 excerpted from a talk which was delivered by Syed Mumtaz Ali in April of 1998