

Conciliatory Approach v/s Confrontational Approach

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Introduction

The Quran outlines a basic principle for peaceful existence in society. It is put thus:

“Reconciliation is best.” (4:128)

This principle teaches that conciliation is the best solution to conflict because, according to God's scheme of things, confrontation is not a tenable approach. An example of this approach was given by God at the time of creation. After He created the first man, God ordained that the angels and the jinns should bow down before Adam. The angels complied, but the leader of the Jinns, Satan, refused to do so. (Quran, 7:18)

These two kinds of conduct set two opposite examples. That of the angels showed the conciliatory approach -- they took the course of *Sulh* -- while Satan set the example of the confrontational approach. As a result of his arrogant and intransigent behaviour, God told Satan that He would cast him into Hell along with all those who trod his path. And that would be the fate of all those who chose to tread the path of confrontation. Therefore, we must refrain from confrontation at all costs.

Examples from History

The **Prophet Adam** was the first man to inhabit the earth. His two sons, Cain and Abel, had an argument over an issue which became so heated that Cain killed Abel. While Abel had adopted a conciliatory approach, his brother Cain opted for confrontation. God then revealed the following verse to the Prophet, which has been recorded in the Quran as follows:

“Whoever killed a human being – shall be regarded as having killed all mankind.” (5:32)

This verse not only emphasizes the depravity of the act of killing but also stresses how the circumstances which can lead up to killing should be dealt with. Man must save himself from falling a prey to factors which can predispose him to committing a murder. This indicates that he must avoid succumbing to the negative emotions of anger, vengeance and hatred. Unless one distances oneself from such factors, one will not be able to save oneself from killing. Right at the beginning of the history of mankind, the example of killing and what leads up to it was set forth in the story of Cain and Abel, so that we should take a lesson from it and be able to prevent ourselves from committing this crime. But, ironically, man has failed to learn from this example, which is why history has time and again been marred by bloodshed. A philosopher once said:

“Man's history is nothing but a register of violence.”

Examples of Prophets

Prophets were sent to humanity at all times but they did not become a part of recorded history. It is only in either the Bible or the Quran that there is any mention of them.. This is a tragedy of human history in that it has left man bereft of the lessons that he could have learned from the lives of the prophets.

The **Prophet Abraham** was born in the city of Ur in Iraq at a time when idol worship was most prevalent. Man fell to worshipping the creations of nature but failed to perceive the magnificence of the Creator. When the Prophet Abraham started preaching the message of the Oneness of God to his community and the King, they grew hostile towards him and even attempted to end his life. But the Prophet Abraham did not retaliate. He neither cursed them nor prayed for ill-fortune to overtake them, because this too would have been a form of confrontation. Instead, he began his travels in search of a land where he could settle down with his family. Eventually, he settled them in the desert of Mecca. This was also a form of conciliatory approach, aimed at raising a generation that would be devoid of the conditioning of the culture of *shirk*. By avoiding the potential confrontation, he kept his wife and child away from the conditioning of his people. The generation that was raised is called the *Banu Ismail*, from which were descended the Prophet and his Companions. By acting in this way, the Prophet Abraham demonstrated that one can avoid confrontation and engage in positive planning.

The **Prophet Joseph** was of the lineage of the Prophet Abraham. He was born in Canaan but, due to a series of untoward events in his life, he reached Egypt. Egypt was then ruled by kings from the Hyksos dynasty. These kings were nature-worshippers but the Prophet Joseph was a believer in the One God. Yet, when the *mushrik* king offered to place the Prophet Joseph in charge of the ministry of food and agriculture, he offered no opposition to the King's wishes but accepted the post under his kingship. The Quran describes this incident in the life of the Prophet Joseph as the '*best story*' (Chapter 12). The Prophet Joseph too had two options – either to set himself up against the King who was an idolator, or to adopt a conciliatory approach. He opted for the latter course. He set the example of not opposing the wishes of the ruler of the land and availing of the other opportunities that presented themselves as a result. He then settled the *Banu Israel* in the most fertile land of Egypt; the *Banu Israel* followed the Prophet Joseph's policy of not confronting the ruler for 500 years.

By the time of the **Prophet Moses**, this situation had undergone a radical change. Since the Hyksos were outsiders, the Coptics (sons of the soil) revolted against them and this dynasty was overthrown. The next dynasty established was that of the Pharaohs. They started abusing the *Banu Israel* because they were settled in the most fertile lands of Egypt. Then came the Prophet Moses, who was also from the lineage of the *Banu Israel*. He likewise had two options – one was to stand up in opposition to the Pharaoh, die and become martyr and the other was to take the *Banu Israel* back to their original land of Palestine. He chose the latter course and Pharaoh and his army were drowned while in pursuit of Moses and the Children of Israel.

Ironically, Sayyid Qutb has stated in his commentary of the Quran that the Prophet Moses wanted to establish the rule of the Children of Israel in Egypt by overthrowing the Pharaoh. This is a preposterous claim. The sequence of events clearly shows that even after the Pharaoh and his army had been drowned and Moses had the option of going back to Egypt, he did not do so. Instead he went away to Israel with his people. This was because, during that period, idol worship had become prevalent in the community of the *Banu Israel*. So he took them to Israel to de-condition them. His example teaches that one must avoid confrontation in order to do constructive work.

The **Prophet Jesus** was born into a Jewish family. Israel was ruled by the Romans in those days, Their Governor, Pilate was an idol worshipper and Jesus had the option of confronting him. In response to his people's complaints, Jesus simply said:

"Give to the King what is due to the King. Give to God that which is due to God."

This formula is applicable even today. The Prophet Jesus set a trend of non-confrontation with government and of availing of opportunities in non-political fields. Having adopted this approach, Christians became the largest community in the world. This conduct of Christians brought to fruition the following Hadith,

"Christians will become the largest community."

The **Prophet Muhammad** started his mission in 610 AD. At every stage of his mission, he adopted the policy of conciliation. The Prophet's general policy, as told by Hazarat Ayesha was,

"Whenever the Prophet had two options, he chose the easier course." (Al-Bukhari)

He did this on all occasions. During the initial phases of the mission in Mecca, the Kabah housed over 360 idols. The shrine had been built by the Prophet Abraham for the worship of the One God, but it had become the centre of idol worship. For thirteen years, the Prophet did nothing about the idols in the Kabah. This was because it would have led to confrontation. He preached the message of the oneness of God from person to person and availed of the opportunities that co-existed with the problem of the idols. He spread the message of the Quran to the people who used to gather at the Kabah to worship and to take part in festivities. But the Quraysh saw the Prophet Muhammad as a threat to their age-old traditions. They started inflicting troubles on him, one after another. After persecution had reached the extreme stage of the *Darun-nadwa* seeking to kill him, the Prophet still did not confront anyone. He quietly migrated to Medina, even though it meant leaving behind his hearth and home.

Anybody who undergoes similar problems in the form of discrimination or *zulm*, has the habit of harping on their sufferings. They write, speak and lead protest marches over the injustices they have faced. But *Seerah Ibn Hisham* recounts that the first Address of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina focused solely on the message of God and the Hereafter. There was not a single mention of any injustice meted out to him or his companions. The gist of his address was,

"O people! Save yourselves from the fire, be it in exchange for a piece of date-palm."

During the ten years he spent at Medina, the Prophet Muhammad never complained of any of the suffering that they had gone through at Mecca. This was despite the launch of offensives, one after another by the Quraysh. He taught that a true *Dai* forgets the discrimination faced by him in the present world and concentrates on telling people about the Hereafter.

To put an end to conflict with his opponents, the Prophet entered into the Hudaibiyya agreement, which was a unilateral no-war pact for ten years. The treaty imposed humiliating conditions on the Prophet and his Companions, but that did not deter his resolve to adhere to it. For example, according to a clause in the Treaty, if a resident of Mecca accepted Islam and went to Medina, he would have to be extradited, whereas if a resident of Medina was caught in Mecca, he would not be sent back. (48:1)

The provision was unilaterally unfair, yet it was accepted by the Prophet so as to avail of a no-war pact. He did not hesitate to pay such a big price. And as history records, his policy produced such positive results that within the span of two years, almost the whole of Arabia had entered the fold of Islam. This is a demonstration of how the policy of non-confrontation leads to success. The present condition of Muslims is the result of their having ignored the policy of reconciliation.

Conclusion

Throughout history, the policy of confrontation has proved fruitless. The US, for example, profited in no way from the war in Iraq. In fact, it wasted so much money that the American economy was shattered and sank into one of the worst recessions in history. The victory attained at this cost was nothing short of a Pyrrhic victory. This is because, in accordance with God's scheme of things, the adoption of the policy of confrontation inevitably leads to failure.

Yesterday, I was reading a report about social work. I started wondering why people find social work more attractive than Dawah work. I realised that it is because social work aims at alleviating visible suffering, unlike Dawah work, which seeks to make man aware of the suffering that can become his fate in the Hereafter. The suffering of the Hereafter will be far greater, but just because it is not visible, man finds it hard to believe in or even pay any attention to.

We must therefore introspect and engage in self-reappraisal, so that we may be enlightened by the teachings of the Quran and change our ways for the better, so that we may be successful both in this world and the world hereafter.