

## Tussling with Injustice

-- Anirudha Balasubramanian

At the heart of all fights against injustice is the fundamental recognition that all humans are equal in moral worth and should treat each other as such. Muhammad (PBUH), Jesus, and Moses not only believed in equality, but also strove to ensure that it would exist in their respective societies. Lazily watching the perpetration of injustice is simple; it takes a true leader to rise against the inequities and cause change. In doing so, one has to overcome the entropic tendencies that govern society, such as ignorance and forgetfulness. Muhammad, Jesus, and Moses, through both words and actions, exemplified discipline, and engaged in a perseverant struggle. Regardless of obstacles, they maintained their principles and proactively transformed their societies. Their absolute faith in God was also central to their capacity to pursue their aims.

Today the corrupting influences of the world are abundant, destroying millions of lives. Drawing from the lives and actions of the three prophets, a leader can fight against the inherent iniquity of inequality. Since a child's mind is the most malleable and prone to perverting influences, the fight must begin on the fundamental level of education. Through moral education programs volunteers, as well as parents, must instill virtues in underprivileged children. Starting on a microcosmic level, the impact of such programs will be profound. Indeed the prophets' method employed education and sermons; first, turn to Moses's example.

Moses was a Hebrew baby raised by the Pharaoh's daughter at a time when the Egyptians had enslaved the Hebrews. He led the Hebrews against the Egyptians and took them toward the promised land of Canaan. From a very young age, he displayed a sense of justice; no incident accentuates this point more than his killing of an Egyptian man who was beating a Hebrew<sup>1</sup>. Although his action was morally problematic, his indignation and consideration of human

dignity is laudable. After fleeing to the Midian desert, Moses rejoined the Hebrews, where he was noted for his compassionate behavior. According to one Midrash, while Moses was taking his lambs to the lake to get water, one slipped away. He left the rest of the lambs and found the one that had escaped, ensuring that it would also get water<sup>2</sup>.

Later, when asked by God to lead the Hebrews against the Pharaoh, a scared Moses replied, “[W]ho am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”<sup>3</sup> Despite his initial misgivings, Moses had faith and accepted his task, sacrificing his personal comfort for the betterment of his people. His people, ailing from the pessimism and disillusionment that accompany injustice, eventually followed him after witnessing the divine signs he made with his staff. When demanding of the Pharaoh that he “let [Moses’s] people go,”<sup>4</sup> Moses was peaceful, not wishing to harm the Egyptians. In fact, it was God who “harden[ed] the Pharaoh’s heart,”<sup>5</sup> leaving Moses no other option than to destroy those opposing the flight of the Hebrews. Before arriving at Mt. Sinai, Moses, inspired by Jethro, established a judicial system for the moral heightening of his community. Such systems also dispel the ignorance that reinforces corruption. Eventually, at Mt. Sinai, God revealed the Ten Commandments and other guidelines in an attempt to end the injustices that plagued societies at the time.

After a while, people once again began to doubt Moses. Aaron, blatantly violating the Ten Commandments, led the people in worshipping a golden calf. Moses, although furious, controlled himself and forgave their behavior. In fact, Moses, arguing against injustice, persuaded God not to wreak havoc upon the people for their lapse: “O Lord, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people. . .remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou didst swear by thine own self, and didst say to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the

stars of heaven.”<sup>6</sup> Moses’s appeal to a moral sense of the truth was so elevated that even God “repented of the evil which He thought to do to His people.”<sup>7</sup>

Moses’s adherence to his principles allowed him to fight injustice. With the premise of human equality before God, he showed that forgiveness, recognition of someone else’s fallibility, is a far more enduring course than that of anger. His faith not only emboldened him, but also guided him to a true understanding of his undertaking. His courage allowed him to assume daunting responsibilities, and his perseverance allowed him to achieve his goals.

Jesus also employed many of these methods to the same effect. Entering a society preoccupied with the concept of separation (preserving that which is holy and clean from what is not<sup>8</sup>), Jesus rejected “the politics of holiness in favor of a new politics of compassion.”<sup>9</sup> Developing the path preached by the eccentric John the Baptist, Jesus quickly gained support from those who had heard of his mysterious powers. Jesus was humble in his use of power; after healing a man of leprosy, “he charged [the man] to tell no one.”<sup>10</sup> As he developed a larger following of apostles and disciples, Jesus pursued a nomadic teaching approach, delivering impromptu sermons. He associated with members of marginalized groups, such as prostitutes and tax collectors. When asked why he associated with such seemingly unscrupulous people, he explained, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”<sup>11</sup>

His most notable struggle was with the Pharisees and those who controlled the synagogue. The Pharisees, slavishly obeying the laws, Jesus argued, had lost sight of what was truly important; instead, people needed to consider only two commandments, upon which “hang all the law and the prophets”<sup>12</sup>: “Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind...[and] love thy neighbor as thyself.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus exposed the Pharisees’

corruption and hypocrisy on many occasions. When he healed a man with dropsy on the Sabbath, for example, the Pharisees reproached him for his disobedience to the laws of the Torah. Pointing out their double standard, Jesus responded, “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?”<sup>14</sup> On another occasion, Jesus revealed their pretense with searing truth: “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness.”<sup>15</sup>

Jesus sacrificed himself for his ideals; his “crucifixion [was] a martyrdom that he was willing to suffer for the sake of his ideas.”<sup>16</sup> Despite the inherently benevolent nature of his mission, Jesus was perceived as “a charismatic prophet [who] did pose a threat to the social order.”<sup>17</sup> Without hesitation, he gave himself up to the Romans, even forgiving their impudence and hatred. “Father, forgive them,” he says, “for they know not what they do.”<sup>18</sup>

The world that Muhammad had to deal with was problematic. The Roman Empire and the Persian Empire occupied most of the world and were constantly fighting. Arabs plundered one another and apparently even buried their daughters alive<sup>19</sup>. Idolatry and usury were rampant. The Sasanians harshly taxed the masses<sup>20</sup>. Corruption stemmed from false authority and power; idolatry produced hierarchies and priesthoods that subjugated people.

As a young child, Muhammad lost both his parents and was taken care of by his uncle, Abu Talib. Because of his honesty and virtuous conduct, he was known as al-Amin (trustworthy); in fact, it was for his steadfastness in matters of business that the widow Khadijah married him. Introducing Islam (submission to Allah) after a divine revelation, Muhammad attempted to do away with “idolatry, usury, immorality, alcoholism, and vain and sanguine pride.”<sup>21</sup> He underwent great difficulties for the sake of the vision set forth by Allah in order to reveal Islam to all. From the Islamic vantage point, “power and authority reside only in God.”<sup>22</sup>

“Allah and whosoever hath knowledge of the Scripture, [is] sufficient witness between [two people]”<sup>23</sup>; in Islam, “intermediaries” between humans and God are fake and corrupt.

The Qurayshis, threatened by Muhammad’s practices, wanted to resolve the matter despite his noble lineage. They tried very hard to tempt him with wealth and fame, but failed in their attempts. After many years of abuse, Muhammad and his followers went to Yathrib. Perseverant as ever, they fended off six years of attacks and finally managed to corner the Qurayshis in Mecca. Instead of vengefully pursuing them, Muhammad offered them a ten-year truce. His actions showed self-discipline and deep faith in his divine mission.

After securing Mecca, Muhammad set his sights upon the al-Ta’if, hoping that he might bring Islam to them too. Their hostile treatment of him culminated in a war; despite occasional setbacks, Muhammad managed to win. It is reported that after the war, Muhammad “was so generous and forgiving to his old enemies and persecutors that some of his followers among the Ansar objected.”<sup>24</sup> Muhammad used forbearance to stifle hate and became a role model whose conduct many sought to emulate. “Call me not as witness to an injustice,”<sup>25</sup> he once said; his actions matched his words. In Islam, “the human being is born not sinful, but forgetful;”<sup>26</sup> thus Muhammad constantly reminded fellow Muslims of yawm-ad-din (Day of Judgment) and taught them to resist forgetfulness in order to hold to what was important. Exemplifying taqwa (moral vigilance) and husna (affirming that which is right), he overcame life’s many temptations.

His messages cautioned strongly against “treachery, deception and hypocrisy,” all manifestations of the decline into forgetfulness, because “those forces have also had far-reaching consequences, damaging relations among nations.”<sup>27</sup> Loyalty, he argued, could defeat these three causes of corruption. The Qur’an stresses the importance of honoring agreements: “Fulfill the covenant of Allah when ye have covenanted, but break not your oaths after the asseveration of

them, and after ye have made Allah surety over you.”<sup>28</sup> The Qur’an also reprimands those who succumb to their forgetfulness: “Cursed are the cheats... they will burn in Jahim and its fire.”<sup>29</sup>

Injustice is an enemy so potent that talk of fighting against it seems futile. It is thus imperative to start at a microcosmic level. In Washington D.C. today, thirty-two percent of children live in poverty, nearly twice the national average<sup>30</sup>. Eighty-five percent of children in the child-welfare program have parents who engage in substance abuse<sup>31</sup>. Society has neglected these children and failed to recognize their moral worth.

The Youth Leadership Foundation, founded in 1997, “[serves] disadvantaged youth from Washington’s inner city by boosting academic performance while developing their character.”<sup>32</sup> This second component to the Foundation’s programs is vital in combating injustice. The volunteers who work with the children on a weekly basis provide role models for the children who attend; they provide moral examples for the children. Because of their focus on sustenance and survival, these children often lend little or no thought to morality and their own conduct. They know or seek to explore little about their relationships to their societies. Volunteers teach these children, who have often been shown anger and hatred at home, that ultimate strength is in morality and forgiveness; such lessons draw from Muhammad, who said, “The strong man is not the good wrestler; the strong man is only the one who controls himself when he is angry.”<sup>33</sup>

Volunteers work with children on academics and the program’s director gives a one-hour character talk each session. The volunteers teach the students self-restraint and perseverance, tools vital for the students’ future success. The program’s goals, however, transcend material success. Each volunteer’s work contains an implicit act of faith; even if the volunteers help just one person, they believe that the world has been improved. Volunteers put in time because they recognize the difference that they are making in the lives of the children they work with.

Specifically, they understand the intrinsically moral nature of teaching – the act of helping someone improve. The volunteers’ work, like that of the Abrahamic prophets, increases the understanding of human connectedness – God’s message.

These children, by virtue of their ability to attend the program, are often not the worst cases. Nevertheless, like the prophets, the volunteers must start off working with those willing to be worked with. The desire is that the children who have passed through the program will rise as leaders and rub off on members of their own society as well. In this way, the positive influence and leadership initially embodied by the volunteers passes through a community.

I currently work in this program and have a few goals for myself and for the program. I would like to raise awareness for the program in local high schools and colleges and create fundraisers to help the program. After thoroughly covering the Northwest D.C. area, the program could further expand and carry on its activities. Ultimately, although a long shot from now, the establishment of such programs in developing countries would have fabulous effects.

A volunteer who dedicates time and energy can easily suffer disenchantment. Such doubt is natural and even beneficial, for it prompts reevaluation of one’s goal and purpose. Indeed even Moses suffered such doubt when he struck a rock to get water, having temporarily lost faith in God. Such questioning and jihad is important, for it ultimately strengthens one’s faith.

Jesus, Moses, and Muhammad recognized humans’ inherent equality. Through their immense faith and trust in God, they championed equality and love fearlessly. They loved when it was easier to hate and sacrificed their comfort for the betterment of their people. Today’s world is in need of such a change, and starting on a small level, we can commence the fight against injustice. All beginnings are small, so however daunting the task, we must not give up.

The three prophets brought and lived the word of God and the time is ripe for us to follow in their footsteps.

### **Works Cited:**

- <sup>1</sup> The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Oxford University Press, 1971.  
Exodus 2:11-13
- <sup>2</sup> Marks, Anton. "Moses." The Hagshama Department. 2007. The World Zionist Organization. 24 Dec 2007 <<http://www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=50>>.
- <sup>3</sup> See 1, Exodus 2:11
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, Exodus 8:1
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, Exodus: 11:10
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, Exodus 32:11-13
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, Exodus 32:14
- <sup>8</sup> Powell, Mark Allen. Jesus as a Figure in History. 1<sup>st</sup>. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.  
p. 108
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 108
- <sup>10</sup> See 1, Luke 4:14
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, Luke 5:31
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, Mark 22:40
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, Mark 22:37-39
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, Luke 14:5
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid, Luke 11:39
- <sup>16</sup> See 8, p. 181
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 109
- <sup>18</sup> See 1, Luke 23:34
- <sup>19</sup> "The World Before the Prophet Muhammad." IslamWeb-English. 7 Nov 2006. IslamWeb. 28 Dec 2007 <<http://www.islamweb.net/ver2/archive/article.php?lang=E&id=134510>>.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid
- <sup>21</sup> Azzam, Abd al-Rahman. The Eternal Message of Muhammad. Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993.
- <sup>22</sup> Shafaat, Ahmad. "Power and Opposition to It: ." Islamic Perspectives. 2000. Islamic Perspectives. 28 Dec 2007  
<<http://www.islamicperspectives.com/PowerAndOpposition.htm>>.
- <sup>23</sup> Pickthal, Muhammad Marmaduke. The Meaning of the Glorious Quran. New York: Asia Book Corp of America, 1979.  
Qur'an translation 13:43
- <sup>24</sup> See 21, p. 27
- <sup>25</sup> Abdul Hameed , Siddiqui. "Translation of Sahih Bukhari." USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts. University of Southern California. 3 Jan 2008  
<<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/>>  
Book 012, Number 3968
- <sup>26</sup> Sells, Michael. Approaching the Qur'an. 1<sup>st</sup>. Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999.

---

p. 40

<sup>27</sup> See 21, p. 251

<sup>28</sup> See 21, p. 252; Qur'an 16:91-92 quoted

<sup>29</sup> See 26, p. 56; a translation of Qur'an 83:1-16

<sup>30</sup> "DC TRENDS: Statistics on Washington." City Trends. 2007. The Progressive Review. 29 Dec 2007 <<http://prorev.com/dctrends.htm>>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> "Welcome to the Youth Leadership Foundation." Youth Leadership Foundation. The Youth Leadership Foundation. 27 Dec 2008 <<http://www.ylf.helpingkids.org/>>.

<sup>33</sup> Riaz, Tayyab. "500 Ahadith." 6 Jan 2003. 2 Jan 2008 <<http://foreninger.uio.no/mss/tr/hadith/hadith1.html>>.