

The Jihad of Love Will Always Overcome

--Jonathan Kesten

A fascinating aspect about modern society on a global scale is the many discrepancies and schisms in religions that lead to disputes and conflict. What is equally fascinating, are the commonalities and emerging motifs that fill the pages of religious doctrine which speak an uncannily similar message. In the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the teachings of the prophets are all transcribed differently through the Torah, Bible and Quran. Yet again, the ingenious message of peace, selflessness and love pour out in a congruent manner. Within the beauty of these teachings is also the beauty that these three religions virtually operate under the manifestation of the same exact God; the creator, the judge, the almighty and ultimate. God provided a most undeserving and holy gift of religion to his children – the people of the world. However in a most unfortunate circumstance, the receiver of the ultimate gift have inevitably corrupted and manipulated a beautiful endowment. The result is *human* conflict through war, killing, injustice, persecution and countless other sin. This augmented human element, however will not succeed in fully tainting the great teachings of the prophets. This truth contends that although a struggle between love and corruption currently subsists, love can and will overcome through the teachings of the prophets. Hope for present society can be found through the transformation that occurred during the lives of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the bountiful teachings that altered the course of human events.

It is unfortunate that the list of corrupting forces in the world is almost limitless. Not to attribute these forces to religion, although considerable impacts have come from human corruption of religion such as the Crusades, political conquest, persecution, genocide and even prejudice on a large and miniscule scale. Humans have turned religion into a tool for polarizing

and even hierarchy. Instead, religion cannot ever be accredited for these and other examples of debasing acts are out of human sin. The positive must be focused upon to enact change for the bettering of society. These prophets were able to revolutionize society with their practices and teachings, which in *its* element can *reverse* corruption of any scale.

The degree in which Moses developed ideals of love, peace and combating injustice was immense enough to play a major role in all three religious sects. While the idea of monotheism was comparably small to other religions of Moses' time, a greater understanding of God is due in large part to his contributions. Along with being the subject of the last four books of the Torah, Moses was responsible for bringing God's message of the Ten Commandments to the corrupt and god-less people of Egypt. The beginnings of Moses were humble; he was born a Hebrew as a slave. During his infancy, the ruling Pharaoh issued a decree to have all the male Hebrew babies drown at birth to eliminate the populace of the race. In a desperate attempt to save her child, Moses' mother, Yocheved, put him in a basket and sent him down the river Nile. His fate is then placed in the hands of the Pharaoh's daughter who hears the crying child as she walks by. She pities the crying infant and adopts him (Exodus 2:1-10). Moses then was raised as a Prince, free of persecution and duty. His ethics are challenged however, when he sees an Egyptian overseer beating a Jewish slave. In reaction, Moses kills the overseer for his injustice. The very next day, Moses tries to make peace between two Hebrews who are fighting, but the aggressor takes offense and says, "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" The realization of this moment gives Moses the understanding not only that he is in danger, but also he begins to understand compassion for all peoples. Despite the injustice that the Egyptian was committing, he did not deserve to be killed. This alternative perspective presents itself later when Moses is forced to choose between forgiveness and punishment of the Jewish people who disobey God.

Moses again takes justice into his own hands; the seven daughters of the Midianite priest are being abused by the Midianite male shepherds, and Moses rises to their defense (Exodus 2:11-22). Compassion and selflessness for all are traits not easily learned by humans, which is demonstrated by Moses' journey.

Later in Moses' journey, he led the Hebrews out of slavery and Egypt. An escape of injustice however came at a price. After forty years of wandering through the desert, the Hebrews had doubted Moses. This is evident after Moses comes down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, only to see the Jews practicing sin in their society when Moses was absent. The Jews would cry out to God, who would offer forgiveness. A direct example of selflessness was again in response to problems from the Hebrews when they complained for water. Moses then asked God how to get water. God told Moses to, in the presence of the Israelites, order a rock to yield its water by speaking to it. Moses then hits the rock with his staff to release the water instead of simply speaking to it. "And remember when Moses prayed for water for his people and We replied, 'Strike the rock with thy staff!' And Moses said, 'Eat and drink the sustenance provided by God, and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption.'" (2:60). Moses specifically addressed corruption, hoping this would silence the Hebrews and cease future corruption. This operation was different than what God had instructed which then conjured His anger against Moses for disobeying His orders. He therefore forbade Moses from entering the land of Israel as punishment. Moses, who now had lost the chance of accompanying his followers into the new land, could have lost hope. However, Moses' love and selflessness for his people was so great that even when God himself had forsaken him, he still brought the Israelites home. Then, when Moses delivers his final summation to the Israelites, he refers back to this episode: "When the Lord heard your loud complaint, He was angry. He

vowed: 'Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers, none except Caleb.... Because of you, the Lord was incensed with me too, and He said: You shall not enter it either. Joshua ... who attends you, he shall enter it'" (1:34-38). Moses went to great lengths, without any incentive in the completion of the journey. This was a mission that had to be completed to fight the injustice in which the Jews escaped from.

Jesus was another categorical pioneer in the advancement of peace and love. In line with Christian belief, Jesus was a perfect mortal, the son of God born a virgin birth to Mary in Bethlehem. Corruption was due much in part to Roman power over the societies where Jesus lived. As a perfect mortal, Jesus serves as an excellent example of peace and love to combat corruption and injustice. During a time when others were banished, hated and persecuted, Jesus spoke out to them. He made a connection with the people by communicating that we are all God's children and He loves us all equally. This specific method is another powerful motif throughout the Abrahamic religions to stop injustice and persecution. In direction with these teachings, Jesus also showed great humility by getting baptized by John. Jesus showed that although he was perfect, he too had a responsibility and *obligation* to serve God, just as all humans should. Moses and Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught this exact message of servitude to God. The message had resonated humbling effects on society. A counter-culture of sorts to Roman rule emerged, where people had lived without material possession in a communal society. This in turn challenged the oppressive Roman Empire, not with war or hostilities, but with love and humility.

Jesus also humbled himself and faced those who were persecuted to show selflessness. Jesus would converse and love the lepers, whom had been outcast by society. Again, Jesus spoke with a Samaritan woman (deemed inappropriate and "unclean" for a Jew). Jesus brought honor to

those who had been denied such privilege. Similarly, Jesus would flip the scripts on society, by eating with both hated tax collectors and the poor. Compassion for even the wealthy and corrupt was shown. Jesus' message for one to "love thy enemy" provided an antithesis to useless fighting and hate between two parties. This message would resonate through the hearts of people, reminding them to be peaceful to everyone, for everyone is God's children. In eating with a greedy tax collector, Zacchaeus, experienced God's saving grace. Through this encounter, Zacchaeus came to trust in Jesus. Zacchaeus then pledged, "Look, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." His heart was transformed; Zacchaeus repented his past and dedicated himself then and there to acts of justice and loving kindness in the present. In response, Jesus stated that "Zacchaeus too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 3:8). The idea of confession and returned forgiveness are a main part of Christianity. Jesus allowed others to confess their sins and offering forgiveness, decreasing further corruption.

The message of the prophets is further portrayed through humility and obedience to God by the prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muhammad's society was a polytheistic Arabian desert, where persecution of other groups is still evident today with the practiced limit of women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Muhammad said: "The most perfect Muslim in the matter of faith is one who has excellent behavior; and the best among you are those who behave best towards their wives," (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 3, Hadith 125). Muhammad's pioneered teachings helped eradicate further corruption from the land. Although Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself was a merchant, he served as a role model for how business should be conducted." Give, therefore, full measure and weight [in all your dealings], and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs; and do not spread corruption on earth" (Al-Muwatta, Volume

21, Hadith 9 and 10). Muhammad also proclaimed in resistance to corruption that, "The best jihad is to speak word of justice to an oppressive ruler" (Sunan of Abu-Dawood, Hadith 2040). Another idea Muhammad used was the idea of judgment by God. "A Muslim is a Muslim's brother; he does not wrong him. If anyone cares for his brother's need, Allah will take care of his need; if anyone relieves his brother's anxiety, Allah will remove from him one of his anxieties on the Day of Resurrection" (Fiqh-us-Sunnah, Volume 3, Number 100). This idea combines both equality under God and brotherhood. This idea is still true today, where it is cited as reasons not to stratify society, as all peoples are equal under His eyes. Similarly, some of the earliest Muslim converts were people that were very poor, as the notion of equality and brotherhood appealed to the once depreciated group. In addition, Muhammad was a strong advocate for emancipation of slaves. He bore witness to slave master's confessing their injustices toward slaves and then released them. A common used phrase in the Quran is "behold what happened to those who spread corruption." Muhammad showed great compassion and the ability to question many aspects of society that were deemed tradition, but were really signs of injustice.

These beautiful messages of the prophets have not escaped my mind. I feel deeply inspired and touched by the enlightenment these teachings can reveal. I feel moved to educate others about these teachings, and while I am of little merit, the world is filled with those who are more than willing to reiterate the beauty. Religious education on a non-denominational basis can be incredibly beneficial and create unbiased atmospheres for the world. This is why education for those in adolescence is incredibly vital. I fully understand the instability and uncertainty that accompany this age, which is why the teachings of peace, love and values while encouraging discussion is not only realistic but necessary for a peaceful future generation. I will start an inter-denominational organization that holds interfaith dialogue of all ages. Our youth are

impressionable and commonly confused about religion. Clarification is so very important to the understanding of peace and love. There is a jihad, meaning *struggle*, which has occurred for thousands of years. However, the light of peace, love and harmony will guide the world's peoples to overcome the struggle of corruption and injustice. Like the commonly referenced vocation in religious doctrine, a shepherd, the societies in which they found themselves were filled with aimless corrupt sheep. The shepherd led the sheep into greener pastures of hope and love. Experiencing salvation and righteousness is extremely liberating and blissful. Bliss is within peace and as we are all children of Abraham, and decent human beings, we all can have a huge impact and spread much more than love into the hearts of those who need to hear the great message of the prophets.

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