

[Home](#) > [Justice, Peace and Prophet Muhammad](#) > [Peace & Justice on Social Level](#) > With Enemies in the Battle Field

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## Peace & Justice on Social Level

The Prophet of Islam was ahead of his times in promoting peace and justice in society. It would be worthwhile to look at how he dealt with non-Muslims minorities and with the enemies during the war time because the true worth of a society manifests when it is put under pressure.

### [With Non-Muslim Minority in Medina](#)

The Prophet and his followers were a persecuted minority in Mecca. When the torture became unbearable, he migrated to Medina, a city in northern Arabia, most of whose inhabitants had already accepted Islam. Once he settled in Medina, the Prophet realized that there was a minority Jewish community in that city that had no inclination to accept Islam. He met them and invited them to a pact with the Muslims so that each religious group in Medina knew its rights and obligations. Some relevant part of the charter reads as follows:

- The Jews who enter into this covenant shall be protected from all insults and vexations; they shall have an equal right as our own people to our assistance and good offices. The Jews of the various tribes...and all other non-Muslim residents of Medina shall form with the Muslims one composite nation
- They shall practice their religion as freely as the Muslims.
- The allies of the Jews shall enjoy the same security and freedom. The guilty shall be pursued and punished. The Jews shall join the Muslims in defending Medina against all enemies. The interior of Medina shall be a sacred place for all who accept this Charter. The allies of the Muslims and of the Jews shall be as respected as the principal parties of this Charter.

This agreement between the first Muslim community and the Jewish community in Medina shows the sense of justice portrayed in the Prophet's character in dealing with minorities. It also clearly shows that the Prophet did not spread Islam, even in the city of Medina, by force; on the contrary, he promoted peaceful co-existence with followers of other faiths, especially Jews and Christians. Out of the three Abrahamic faiths, it is only Islam which has recognized Judaism and Christianity on a theological level; the Jews and the Christians are known, in Islam, as Ahlul Kitāb, the People of the Scriptures.

Following the example of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) many rulers in Muslim history maintained peaceful and cordial relations with their non-Muslim subjects. If we were to compare the attitude of the Muslim rulers towards the minorities living under their rule during the nineteenth century—with the attitude of the Europeans and the Americans towards their minorities, I dare to say that the record of the Muslims would be much better. Professor Roderic Davison, a prominent historian of the Ottoman Empire, writes, "It might in fact have been argued that the Turks were less oppressive of their subject people than were Prussians of the Poles, the English of the Irish, or the Americans of the Negroes... There is evidence to show that in this period [i.e., late 19th century], there was emigration from independent Greece into the Ottoman Empire, since some Greeks found the Ottoman government a more indulgent master [than their own Greek government]." [1](#)

If you study the medieval history of Europe, you will see that the only model of a peaceful multi-cultural and multi-faith society was Spain under the Muslim rule—a Spain in which Christians, Jews and Muslims lived in peace and harmony.

## **Non-Muslim Relatives & Neighbours**

An Islamic injunction about loving and caring for a neighbour covers all kinds of neighbours:

***“Worship God and do not associate anything with Him, and be good to the parents and to the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the neighbour who is your relative, the neighbour who is not your relative, the fellow traveler, the wayfarer and the slave. Verily God does not love one who behaves proudly and boastfully.” (Surah an-Nisaa, 4:36)***

Even if a Muslim's parents are idol-worshippers, Islam—the religion of monotheism— instructs him to respect and be kind to them. Almighty God says in the Qur'ān:

***“And if they [that is, your parents] insist on you to associate (an idol) with Me... then do not obey them; however, live with them in this world kindly...” (Surah al-Luqman, 31:15)***

## With Enemies in the Battle Field

The Qur'ān instructs the Muslims to maintain justice even when dealing with their enemies.

***“O you who believe, be maintainers of justice (and bearer of) witness for (the sake of) God. Let not hatred of a people incite you to act unjustly; be just—this is nearer to righteousness. And fear God surely God is aware of what you do.” (Surah al-Maida, 5:8)***

The first battle in the Muslim history is very significant. It took place in the 2nd year of the Muslim calendar between the Muslims and the polytheists of Mecca. Even though outnumbered and ill-equipped, the Muslims defeated the Meccans and took seventy prisoners of war.

The norm among all societies at that time was to either kill the POWs or make them slaves. But Prophet Muhammad instructed the Muslims to treat the POWs humanely; they were brought back safely to Medina and given decent lodging in the houses of the people who had taken them prisoners. The Qur'ān decreed that the POWs must not be ill-treated in any way.

According to a Western biographer of Prophet Muhammad, Sir William Muir, “In pursuance of Mahomet’s commands, the citizens of Medina...received the prisoners and treated them with much consideration. ‘Blessings be on the men of Medina’, said one of the prisoners in later days, ‘they made us ride, while they themselves walked, they gave us wheaten bread to eat when there was little of it; contenting themselves with dates.’”

The way the Prophet dealt with the prisoners was very revolutionary. The poor prisoners were released free; those who came from affluent families of Mecca were returned for a specified ransom. (See the Qur'ān: Surah Muhammad, 47:4) But the most interesting case was of those prisoners who were literate – the Prophet Muhammad made a deal with them that they could go free if they could teach ten Muslim children how to read and write.

Even the rules of engagement during war are also important. Whenever Muslims embarked on the minor jihād, a defensive jihād, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had standard instructions regarding non-combatants and also the environment:

- “Do not violate the treaties.”
- “Do not kill an old person or a child or a woman.”
- “Do not cut down a tree.”

- “Neither burn down the palm-trees nor drown them with water.”
- “Do not cut down a tree bearing fruits.”
- “Do not drown the plantations.”
- “Do not poison the water of the infidels.”<sup>2</sup>

All this was done fourteen hundred years ago; long, long before the Geneva Convention came about.

In background of the secret prisons run by the CIA, ‘the manual of torture’ written by the US army to interrogate the prisoners, and the disclosure of torture in Abu Ghuraib prison, I can proudly say that the example and teachings of Prophet Muhammad about Prisoners of War (POWs) are “definitively good and humane” even according to the standards of the 21st century.

<sup>1</sup>. Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856–1876* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963) p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>. Al-Hurr al-‘Amili, *Wasā’ilu ’sh-Shah*, vol. 11, p. 43–45.

The Prophet Muhammad also specified the rights of animals. He said:

- (1) Not to burden it with a load beyond its ability.
- (2) Not to make it walk more than its ability.
- (3) When you reach a rest area, first you, the rider, must provide the fodder for your animal before taking care of your own needs.
- (4) Whenever you pass by a pool of water or a river let the animal quince its thirst.
- (5) Do not hit on its face because it also praises its Lord.

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