

# Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ As a Response to the Civilizational Challenges of the World

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## Abstract

The Clash of Civilizations theory by Samuel Huntington creates an antagonistic interpretation among civilizations and pushes towards a pessimistic understanding regarding inter-civilizational discourse and dialogue. Such a theory narrows down the scope for a harmonious and peaceful co-existence between civilizations and divides them along the conflictual paradigm. A paradigm that is bound to create various civilizational challenges in the world. However, the post-globalisation world rejects the Eurocentric interpretation of civilization and focuses on civilizational discourse, away from a Eurocentric approach. Western thinkers like Arnold J. Toynbee and Marshall Hodgson were the proponents of this non-eurocentric approach towards studying civilization and world history. The clash theory between civilizations undermines the possibilities of understanding, cooperation and mutual regard between different cultural groups, downplaying the aspect of multiculturalism and diversity in the world. Prophetic ﷺ Sīrah addresses all these civilizational challenges. A study of the Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ reveals that the fundamental principles, values and ethics on which Prophet Muhammad ﷺ built Islamic civilization negate any conflictual exchange among civilizations. Prophetic ﷺ Sīrah encourages a constructive engagement and harmonious co-existence between civilizations and provides profound insights into addressing civilizational challenges of the world. This paper examines the Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as a comprehensive response to the civilizational challenges of the modern world. It argues that the lessons drawn from the Sīrah provide a roadmap for addressing contemporary social, ethical, political, and economic challenges.

**Keywords:** *Sīrah, civilization, challenges, response, ethics, social justice, governance*

## 1.1 Introduction

Civilization is generally perceived as an advanced stage of human development and refinement of intellect, morals, and taste. Understanding of civilization is also associated with the growth of urbanisation, the emergence of sophisticated social and political institutions, progress in arts and science, the use of record keeping, and cultural and material development. The concept of civilization is vast, dynamic, evolving and subjective in its outlook. Multiple disciplines of knowledge interact with each other and co-exist at the same time in a civilization. Disciplines like Sociology, Psychology, Politics, Ethics, Economics, Anthropology, and Aesthetics work in a complementary relationship to bring about the development of a civilization. Development of human communication, social stratification, and division of labour also represent important aspects of civilization. The global world is multipolar in nature. There are different nations and cultures that exist and are evolving as strategic centers of the world. A stable and healthy civilization is one that is moderate in its approach towards various dimensions of life and balances the extremities of human existence. The epistemological and axiological foundation of Islamic civilization constructed by Prophetic ﷺ Sunnah facilitates cross-cultural exchange of knowledge and values. It establishes that giving and taking in civilization is a norm and not an exception.

In the construction of Islamic civilization, the authority of Sīrah holds a central position. The principles of justice, compassion, mercy, and equality that the prophetic Sīrah manifests guide and shape the course of Islamic civilization. The Sīrah also complements the Divine revelation, i.e., the Qur'ān, and there has been a dynamic interplay between the Qur'ān and Sīrah throughout Islamic history. Sīrah provides a contextual understanding of the Qur'ān and is inseparable from it. The Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is among the primary sources upon which the epistemological and axiological framework of Islamic civilization and society is built. Sīrah is the source of ethics, social values and morals in Islam. A stable social order is a necessary prerequisite for any civilization to grow and flourish. A stable social order is one in which morality and ethical integrity rule the day. The study of the Sīrah is directly linked to the establishment of a stable social order. Sīrah shows a path for the healthy functioning of society and the development of a balanced community. The lessons drawn from the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ demonstrate his unwavering efforts in cultivating a morally upright society. Sīrah reveals that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ built a society that was morally upright in its social, political, and economic affairs. His ﷺ able leadership qualities showed how justice is intrinsically linked with ethics. The Qur'ān introduces Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as a mercy for the whole world. Therefore, the values and principles that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ imparted transcend any specific era of history and are intended for the betterment of entire humanity. The current paper argues that the study of the Sīrah highlights the struggle and triumph of

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in establishing a morally and ethically upright society. Through his exemplary leadership qualities, the Prophet ﷺ demonstrated how a stable social order is built, which in turn lays the foundation for a thriving civilization. The discourse on the Prophet's ﷺ life furnishes practical means to combat the antagonistic trends of civilizational exchanges in modern parlance.

The rise and fall of civilizations is marked by ethical decay, socio-political turmoil, economic exploitation, and interfaith discord. In response to these challenges, the Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ offers a timeless model that addresses these crises comprehensively. His ﷺ leadership in Mecca and Madinah laid the foundation for an inclusive, just, and morally sound society. This paper examines how the Prophet's actions and teachings provide practical solutions to contemporary civilizational challenges, particularly in the realms of moral guidance, ethical standards, social equality and political governance. The paper employs a qualitative research methodology.

## 1.2 Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as a Means of Global Peace

Prophetic Sīrah refers to the comprehensive biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ documenting his life, character, teachings, and actions. *Sīrah* comes from the Arabic word *Sāra*, meaning “way” or “path.” It is often used to describe the “way” of the Prophet ﷺ. The Sīrah encompasses not just the historical events of his life but also his ethical conduct, interactions, and guidance on matters of faith, society, and governance. The Prophetic Sīrah serves as a profound source of social ethics and values, offering essential guidance for the development of a healthy and peaceful societies. The Prophetic ethics that have shaped Islamic civilization differ widely from post-modern ethical theories. The Prophetic Sīrah connects ethics and values to Divine revelation, which is a sound source of knowledge that establishes the status of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as an authority on social and ethical standards of the society. Islamic civilization is essentially a God-centric civilization whose epistemological and ontological foundations are based upon the revelation and the Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ chosen to guide humanity. All Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ in Islam have been sent with a Divine mission to spread the message of God and guide people on the straight path.

A noteworthy thing about all Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ of Islam is the unity and commonality in the message that they preached. The central message of all Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ is the oneness of the Creator, i.e., *Tawhīd* and throughout their lives, the prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ invited people towards the worship of one God. Besides being the spiritual and moral guides of the people they were sent towards, the Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ of Islam were warners, bearers of good news and reminders to human beings regarding their responsibilities towards God and their fellow humans. Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ rectify human affairs and

remove the barriers of ignorance between God and humanity. Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ bring humanity close to their Creator and enlighten their souls with the true essence of *Tawhīd*.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was the culminating point of the institution of *Risālah* in Islam. Among the Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ God sent prophet Muhammad ﷺ as the last messenger, seal and leader of all Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ. The Book and guidance he ﷺ was sent with are universal. His exemplary character and leadership are the significant sources behind the spread and development of Islamic civilization in its present form.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was the leader of Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ the last one, who was favored by God with the eternal and universal mantle of Prophethood and was given an imperishable Scripture and law for the guidance of whole of humanity for all times to come irrespective of color, race or language.<sup>1</sup>

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ represents the finality of Prophethood in Islamic civilization in the list of Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ sent by God. The history of all Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ is an integral part of Islamic civilization. However, the law of Islam, i.e., *Sharī'ah* and the final revelation, i.e., the Qur'ān given to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is universal and meant for all humanity till the end of times. Hence, the social ethics and their practical manifestation through the leadership of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ acquire a universal dimension. Regarding this, the Qur'ān says:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.<sup>2</sup>

Whether social dealings, political affairs, the justice system, economic affairs, or family matters, Prophetic ethics guide humanity in all domains of life. Before the announcement of his ﷺ Prophethood, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was referred by the names of *al-Amīn* (the trustworthy) and *aş-Şādiq* (the truthful), which depicts the traits of honesty and integrity as the very essence of Prophetic leadership, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ showed that without proper moral codes, the structure of society will weaken internally. “One of the fundamental crises facing civilizations is moral decline. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ confronted a society plagued by dishonesty, oppression, and moral corruption. His personal character, described as *al-Amīn* (the trustworthy) and *al-Sādiq* (the truthful), set a standard for integrity and ethical behaviour.” (Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, 2006). His ﷺ teachings emphasized “*Şidq* (honesty), *Adl* (justice) and compassion *Raḥmah* (compassion), essential virtues for any stable civilization. The Prophet's farewell sermon is a testament to his ethical vision, advocating for human dignity, gender equity, and social responsibility.” (al- Qaraḏāwī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah*, 2010). The *Sīrah*

<sup>1</sup> Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Islamic Concept of Prophethood* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publication translation by Mohiuddin Ahmad, 2023), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Al- Qur'ān, 21:107, Translation from Sahih International.

emphasized the importance of these character traits in cultivating and developing social ethics. The Sīrah envisions ethics as encompassing the entirety of human existence, emphasizing a holistic approach to moral principles. It rejects any ethical discourse that views reality as fragmented or atomistic. Instead, it promotes an integrated and comprehensive understanding of ethical conduct within the broader context of life.

There is a continuous battle between good and evil in the world, and it does not befit the mercy of the Creator to leave human beings alone in such battles. Also, the knowledge and wisdom that God bestowed upon His Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ in general and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in particular is sound, distinct and unambiguous in its epistemological foundations. The knowledge structure constructed by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was not a mere creation of his ﷺ mind; instead, it was backed by *Wahy* (Divine revelation). Prophet ﷺ witnessed the realities that were imperceptible to the senses of ordinary individuals. Hence, a prophetic knowledge system is perfect and infallible, and so is the ethics that emerge from this knowledge. *Wahy*, as a supreme attribute and miracle of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, is what separates him ﷺ from the ordinary leaders of the world.

In a material civilization, the acquisition of knowledge depends upon perception through senses and intellectual capabilities; this knowledge is imperfect and subject to many limitations. The knowledge presented by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ originates from Divine revelation and is convinced of its claim of being the only guidance for humanity.<sup>3</sup>

The current era is a witness to the emergence of different ideologies. These ideologies are used to achieve political, economic and religious ends. Western civilization has a history of diverse ideological undercurrents that have shaped its social, political and material end goals. The ingredients of such a civilization were derived from the concepts of Darwinism, Capitalism, Liberalism, Humanism and Nihilism. The body politic of Western civilization was also built from the debris of Greco-Roman civilization. However, there was no moral enthusiasm left in these civilizations that could have inspired the trajectory of Western civilization. From its beginning, Western civilization was undergoing changes without any identifiable purpose. Such a directionless journey was bound to create spiritual and moral disquiet in human existence, leading to serious civilizational challenges.

The spirit of science and rationalism, secular humanism and nationalism of the modern age can be directly traced to the elements of Hellenistic thought. The result of these developments is the creation of a spiritual and moral vacuum which the West tries to fill with other man-made systems and ideologies. Being realist

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<sup>3</sup> Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Islamic Concept of Prophethood* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publication translation by Mohiuddin Ahmad, 2023), 12.

and positivist by its very nature, Western civilization was not directed by unchanging values, instead, in the process of meeting its material and technological needs, its existential purpose also changed.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is astonishing to see that although religion has also contributed a lot to this civilization, it was still subjected to extreme marginalization and the state was itself described as the be-all and end-all of everything. The division between religion and science resulted in the secularization of the state and its sole concern was narrowed down mainly to material developments. However, civilization should be able to satisfy both the physical and spiritual needs of society; excessive emphasis on materialistic things and a highly mechanized society creates a spiritual vacuum that can weaken a civilization internally. What are the factors that lead to the establishment of a stable social order and healthy functioning societies? This question will always be relevant as long as human societies exist.

The existence of constant, unchanging and universal values and ethics whose origin is not merely human intellect but a metaphysical reality answers the question. A civilization whose values and ethical system are not susceptible to the influences of external ideologies tends to be more balanced and successful in creating stability in society. Western civilization has been under the continuous influence of different ideologies throughout its history, which have kept changing its value system. A fluctuating value system can never be a source of strength for any society; instead, it will create a space for internal chaos and decay. The value system of Islamic civilization is universal and meant for all times. The reason is that the roots of this civilization are firmly grounded in fundamental principles whose source is Divine. The values and ethics of Islamic civilization are the manifestation of Qur'ān and Sunnah. Islamic ethical system seek to safeguard the dignity and self-respect of human beings. The practical application of this moral system is reflected in the Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ itself.

### 1.3 Sīrah Social Ethics and Social Order

Axiology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the study of human values and ethics. Values and ethics are instrumental in maintaining and sustaining a sound and balanced social order. How does a value system keep human society functionally healthy? What is the epistemological base of a value system that aligns with the innate and inner predisposition of the human self? These are the fundamental questions that relate to the ethical theories of a civilization. In Islamic civilization, this epistemology on ethics and values comes first from the Qur'ān and then from prophetic Sīrah to guide and shape human behaviour and conduct in a constructive way. The principles that emerge from Sīrah impart their character on the social ethics of Islamic civilization. It must be noted here that all the principles of Islamic civilization

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<sup>4</sup> Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Religion and Civilization* 4<sup>th</sup> edition. (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publication translation by Mohiuddin Ahmad, 1980), 2.

share an underlying unity between them because of their association with the concept of *tawhīd* in Islam. *Tawhīd*, being the very essence and an uncompromising aspect of Islamic civilization, gives authority to all other principles of Islamic civilization, including the Prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ. Belief in God is inseparable from faith in Muhammad ﷺ and whatever he ﷺ brought. In the context of social ethics, The Qur’ān outlines the profound role that the Sīrah of Muhammad ﷺ plays:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom - although they were before in clear error.<sup>5</sup>

This Qur’ānic verse defines the role that Muhammad ﷺ played in the moral and spiritual rectification of individuals. Ethically and morally healthy individuals are the backbone of a progressive civilization and stable social order. The presence of morally upright, spiritually strong and trustworthy individuals who are honest in their social and political transactions is indispensable if civilization has to grow and develop uninterrupted. The Sīrah shows the exemplary leadership qualities of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in developing such individuals who were impeccable in their character and the strength of this character allowed them to spread Islam to the farthest parts of the world like North Africa and Spain. These people were the *Ṣaḥābah* (companions) of Muhammad ﷺ and the foundation of their characters was the result of the moral standards of Muhammad ﷺ. In fact, in an authentic narration, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: “Abu Huraira reports: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, verily, I have only been sent to perfect righteous character.”<sup>6</sup> High moral and ethical standards are prerequisites for cultivating righteous characters and developing healthy societies. The Prophetic Sīrah paves the way toward such lofty ethical standards. The character development and moral soundness of human beings have been the central subjects of Prophetic struggle. The study of Sīrah reveals that:

The Prophet ﷺ had realized that the enemy was not anywhere outside; it was within the hearts and minds of human beings. It was in their morals and beliefs. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ knew that this was more dangerous and baneful than all hostile forces outside, for this danger emanated from within and from the innermost self of humans.<sup>7</sup> By emphasizing the dignity and equality of human beings, Prophetic Sīrah eliminates the hostilities and enmity between human beings. Consequently, the foundation of civilization

<sup>5</sup> Al- Qur’ān, 62:2, Translation from Sahih International.

<sup>6</sup> Musnad Ahmad, Hadith Number 8952.

<sup>7</sup> Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Islamic Concept of Prophethood* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publication translation by Mohiuddin Ahmad, 2023), 16.

is led by mutual respect, trust, integrity and a sense of responsibility and not on divisive ideological undercurrents which divide humanity on race and geography.

#### 1.4 Sīrah Social Ethics and Ākhirah

The Sīrah aligns social ethics and morals with the higher objectives of accountability and responsibility. It invokes this consciousness within human existence that their deeds and actions don't just end in this world but have an impact in another world as well. This represents the concept of *Ākhirah* (hereafter), which is an inseparable part of the Prophetic message and mission. *Ākhirah* assumes a central position in the flourishing of ethical order preached by Prophet ﷺ and something which differentiates the Prophetic mission of social reformation from other missions and Islamic society from other societies.

A healthy morality is indispensable for establishing an Islamic society and a just and ethical order. The Prophets ﷺ call for unquestionable acceptance of the hereafter justifies and upholds the moral principles that he ﷺ inculcates in the thoughts, character, feelings, and conduct of human beings.<sup>8</sup>

By relating the principle of hereafter with the ethical practices of human society, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ aimed to rectify the weaknesses and errors of human character. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ made sure that the concept of accountability runs deep through the thoughts, intentions and actions of people. One of the outcomes of this character training was the emergence of people who were trustworthy in their social, political, and economic affairs. Sīrah of Prophet ﷺ integrated social ethics with the concept of the hereafter and presented both as a profound source for developing Islamic thought. Sīrah depicted that the ethical conduct of individuals is directly linked to their accountability in the hereafter. This connection profoundly influenced the development of Islamic civilization, shaping personal behaviour, governance, and social institutions. Prophet ﷺ encouraged Muslims to be just, honest and merciful in their social dealings because their actions will have consequences in the hereafter. Sīrah presented the concept of the hereafter as a motivating force for good ethical conduct and associated the values of justice, brotherhood, compassion and honesty with supreme success on the day of judgment. Sīrah institutionalized justice in Islamic law and governance. Justice became a fundamental principle of leadership in Islamic civilization. Whether in the political or economic system, the principle of justice was always upheld in the policies of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Trustworthy and dependable were the believers brought up by the Prophet ﷺ of Islam. Their hearts were filled with the awe of God, they preferred the hereafter over the world and all that it stands for and

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<sup>8</sup> Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Islamic Concept of Prophethood* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publication translation by Mohiuddin Ahmad, 2023), 62.



possessed the spirituality which overcomes the material in man. They never lost sight of their abode in the world beyond. Hence, one finds them candidly upright and square-dealing in trades and business, honest and laborious at their jobs. Warm-hearted, impartial, just and merciful in their conduct of administration. Faithful in managing the affairs entrusted to them.<sup>9</sup>

Besides the call to the hereafter and self-introspection of one's actions, which can either bring reward or punishment, what distinguishes Prophetic ethics from other ethical theories. It is the Prophet's ﷺ constant attribution of all his ﷺ claims towards God almighty. "Prophet ﷺ makes the people realize that merely relying on senses, intellect or any mystical experience will prove to be futile and any social order whose foundation is mere human experiences will be defective and will collapse internally."<sup>10</sup>

Prophetic Sīrah connected the reward of *Husn al-'akhlāq* (beautiful morals) in the hereafter with the *Rīḍa* (pleasure) of God Almighty. It clearly outlined that the ultimate purpose of all good qualities in human beings in the form of excellent ethics and values is to get closer to the One who created us. The Messenger of God Muhammad ﷺ condensed the whole concept of God's pleasure into a phrase of a few words. He said God accepts only those deeds that have been performed purely to seek His pleasure, which makes it clear that Islam rejects goals confined to material gains only because that sounds selfish. It suggests seeking the pleasure of God as the ultimate goal for man's ethical endeavours in life.<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, the social ethics of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, such as justice, mercy, equality, and integrity, are intrinsically linked to the Islamic belief in the hereafter. These ethical principles became the foundation of Islamic civilization's governance, legal systems, economy, and social welfare structures. Sīrah serves as a source of constant reminder of accountability in the *Ākhirah*. The concept of *Ākhirah* afterwards motivated individuals and institutions to uphold the Prophet's ﷺ social ethics, shaping a civilization that values justice, compassion, and collective welfare in all aspects of life.

## 1.5 Sīrah Social Ethics and Taqwā

*Taqwā*, often translated as God-consciousness or piety, refers to an intense awareness of God in all aspects of life. It shapes one's relationship with both the Creator and creation. Prophetic Sīrah presents *Taqwā* as the foundation of ethical behaviour in Islamic civilization and exemplifies it through its focus on sincerity in worship as well as self-accountability. Every action must be performed with the intention of pleasing

<sup>9</sup> Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Islamic Concept of Prophethood* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publication translation by Mohiuddin Ahmad, 2023), 127.

<sup>10</sup> Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Religion and Civilization* 4<sup>th</sup> edition. ((Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publication translation by Mohiuddin Ahmad, 1980), 72.

<sup>11</sup> Sayyid Abu A'la Māūdūdī, *Islamic Civilization Its Foundation Beliefs and Principles* (UK: The Islamic Foundation Kube Publishing, Translated from Urdu *Islāmī Tadhīb awr uske Uṣūl -o-Mābadī* into English by Syed Akif, 2013), 35-36.

God only, and sincerity in one's actions must be constantly purified through self-reflection. Sīrah shows that *Taqwā* beautifies human existence by protecting its inner worth and elevating its standards. Humans are beautiful when they do what they have been created for. The social ethics that Sīrah strives for are rooted in *Taqwā*.

The Prophet ﷺ taught the importance of speaking truthfully and refraining from slander or harmful gossip. The Prophet ﷺ was kind and just even with those who did not share his faith, establishing treaties and protecting the rights of non-Muslims living in Muslim lands. *Taqwā* encourages social ethics towards a direction of collective welfare. The Prophet ﷺ balanced individual *Taqwā* with concern for the whole of humanity. He encouraged Muslims to look after one another, reinforcing the concept of *Ukhūwah* (brotherhood) in Islam. In situations of conflict, the Prophet encouraged forgiveness and reconciliation. After the conquest of Makkah, he famously forgave those who had previously opposed him. "The Prophetic teachings served as a source of strong moral force that brought the generations towards the way of *Taqwā*. Faith in God, certainty of the day of judgment, and awareness of being always under the watchfulness of God were the qualities that the Prophet ﷺ ingrained in their characters."<sup>12</sup>

Prophetic Sīrah also demonstrated that one of the crucial aspects of social ethics to inculcate *Taqwā* in humans is social modesty, which in Islamic terminology is referred to as *Hayā*. Respectful behaviour, humility and abstaining from arrogance are the attributes of a society where the principle of *Hayā* is dominant. *Hayā* also guides and shapes the social interactions between genders in Islam to ensure decency and respect. *Hayā* in social life includes safeguarding one's gaze, as emphasized in the Qur'ān:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ أَرَبَّىٰ لَهُمْ إِذَا لَقُوا اللَّهَ خَيْرٌ بِمَا بَصَلُوا  
مَوْقِلٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا

Oh Prophet! Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, That is purer for them. Surely Allah is All-Aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments except what normally appears.<sup>13</sup>

Prophetic Sīrah integrates *Hayā* as a vital constituent of *Taqwā* with the moral and spiritual life of human existence. Prophet ﷺ showed that the paradigm of *Hayā* is a source of self-respect, humility and dignity in Islamic civilization. *Hayā* is inseparable from *Taqwā* and both are inseparable from social ethics. *Hayā* drives human thoughts and feelings toward a sense of shame and reluctance to do sins in front of

<sup>12</sup> Mawlānā Abū al-Hasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Islamic Concept of Prophethood* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publication translation by Mohiuddin Ahmad, 2023), 131-132.

<sup>13</sup> Al- Qur'ān, 24: 30-31, Translation from Sahih International.

Allah. This is why Prophet Muhammad ﷺ considered *Ḥayā* as an integral part of *Īmān* (faith). Some of the authentic *Ḥadīth* (narrations) of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in this respect are: The Prophet ﷺ said:

1. “Ḥayā does not bring anything except good.”<sup>14</sup>
2. “Ḥayā is a part of Īmān and Īmān will be in Jannah. Obscenity in speech is a part of harshness and harshness will be in hell.”<sup>15</sup>
3. “Every religion has its distinct characteristic, and the distinct characteristic of Islam is Ḥayā.”<sup>16</sup>
4. “Ḥayā and Īmān are together; when one of them is removed, the other is removed.”<sup>17</sup>

So, both in behaviour and appearance, Prophetic ethics guide humankind toward decency and righteousness in all spheres of life and seek to establish a deep relationship between *Taqwā* and the ethical system of a society. The *Sīrah* of Prophet ﷺ clearly illustrated that *Taqwā* leads to *Ḥayā*, which in turn leads to moral righteousness and intellectual and spiritual well-being of human beings. In Islamic civilization, *Ḥayā* is closely linked to *Īmān* (faith) and *Taqwā* (God-consciousness) as they shield a human soul from indulging in harmful actions and promote doing good deeds. They also guard human solitude against falling into the filth of sins under the pretext that no one is seeing and instil this feeling in the heart that God is watching all the time and nothing can escape from His sight. Hence, they shape the overall conduct and human relationship with God Almighty and protect the ethical fabric of human societies.

The social ethics in the Prophetic *Sīrah* are deeply rooted in *Taqwā* and *Ḥayā*. They form a comprehensive ethical system encompassing every aspect of life—personal conduct, social justice, and interactions with others. Through these teachings, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ provided a timeless framework for ethical living based on the consciousness of God and compassion for humanity. Islamic civilization under Prophet Muhammad’s ﷺ guidance, which represented the continuation of the Divine message of all previously sent Prophets عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ of God, was directed towards the formation of a virtuous civilization and reflected the culmination of Prophets Muhammad’s ﷺ virtuous character. This virtuous civilization always guards society against falling into moral crisis and unhealthy social order; the mechanism to achieve that is *Taqwā* and *Ḥayā*.

<sup>14</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, *Ḥadīth* No. 6119.

<sup>15</sup> [Sunan Ibn Majah](#), *Ḥadīth* No. 4148.

<sup>16</sup> [Sunan Ibn Majah](#), *Ḥadīth* No. 4182.

<sup>17</sup> Sunan Abu Dawood, *Ḥadīth* No. 4771.

## 2.1 Prophetic Leadership and Islamic Civilization

The Islamic society established through the efforts of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ stands as one of the most virtuous, refined, and exemplary civilizations ever recorded in human history. Ibn Tayyimiyyah (RA) succinctly brings out the prominence of this civilization established under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which was the symbol of man's core virtues. Ibn Tayyimiyyah (RA) presents the people whose characters were shaped by Prophetic teachings as the outstanding civilizational achievements of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. These people in Islamic history are known as *Ṣaḥābah* (companions of Prophet ﷺ). They received direct guidance from Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as they witnessed his ﷺ blessed company. The foundation of their Islamic identity and characters was so strong that they expanded the Islamic civilization from North Africa to Spain to Constantinople. "The companions were the best men among the Muslims, for they excelled all in faith and virtue."<sup>18</sup>

The fate of any civilization is intrinsically tied to the kind of individuals it nurtures. The teachings and ideal conduct of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ developed not only the early Muslim community to the pinnacle of their morality and ethics but also had a far-reaching influence on the broader development of Islamic civilization. It is for this reason that the Holy book of God, The Qur'ān, calls Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as an ideal role model both at personal and collective levels for all generations to come.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often.<sup>19</sup>

One of the defining characteristics of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ leadership was his ﷺ practice of *Shūrā* consultation. He sought the counsel of his ﷺ *Ṣaḥābah* and established a tradition of inclusivity and cooperation that fostered community development in Islamic civilization. The focus on justice, mercy, and compassion constituted the essence of his ﷺ leadership, creating a new moral code for the world. Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ leadership extended outside the boundaries of immediate challenges. Instead, his ﷺ leadership transcended time and space. His ﷺ foresight concerning intellectual, moral, spiritual and material prosperity, as reflected in treaties like the *Mithāq al-Madīnah* (Constitution of Madīnah, which developed a multi-religious community under shared laws and was the remarkable example of a pluralistic society), established the foundation for an Islamic civilization that thrived for centuries. Prophet

<sup>18</sup> Minhaj-us-Sunnah, Vol. III, P. 324.

<sup>19</sup> Al- Qur'ān, 33:21, Translation from Sahih International.

Muhammad ﷺ guided people by his ﷺ exemplary character rather than through fear or coercion. His ﷺ simplicity, humility, and commitment to service inspired people around him. He ﷺ provided an example of leadership that fostered acceptance rather than merely following orders. His ﷺ leadership brought significant changes in the societal and cultural framework, including reforms in family life, women's rights, slavery, and economic fairness, which were critical in forming a just and balanced society.

The Prophet ﷺ is a tower of strength for all nations and all ages, for he ﷺ is like the radiant sun whose rays give light and life to every nook and corner of the world. Humankind, indeed, owes to him ﷺ all virtues like social justice, the pursuit of knowledge, tolerance, liberty and other higher vistas of human grace and goodness.<sup>20</sup>

So strong was the impact of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ leadership qualities and ethical training that the individuals he ﷺ prepared liberated the lands held by Romans and Persians in a very short period. The moral principles that the companions of Prophet ﷺ displayed in liberating these lands were unparalleled in the history of humankind. They not only reformed the justice and economic system of these lands but also protected the resources of the indigenous population. This was in sharp contrast to the modern colonial forces who plundered and depleted the resources of the lands that they colonized. "The moral leadership and great ethical qualities of the Holy Prophet ﷺ raised the people who brought forth the Islamic civilization into fruition."<sup>21</sup>

The leadership of Prophet ﷺ built the framework of Islamic civilization on the principle of *Tawhīd* (absolute unity of God), His awe and unshakeable faith in Him. This civilization detested paganism and associating any particular with God Almighty. Divine beliefs served as the foundation of Islamic civilization's epistemic values. These Divine epistemic values, which were expressed through the Prophet's ﷺ leadership and life, protected Islamic civilization from falling into extreme and substandard positions. Instead, Islamic civilization became a civilization of moderation and balance in all affairs of human life. Prophetic leadership is a Divinely blessed phenomenon. Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ was always inspired and guided through Divine revelation. Islamic civilization's epistemological, axiological and ontological principles thrive on the Divine knowledge system. This knowledge system was communicated and disseminated through Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ life and character. This is what separates Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as a leader from other worldly leaders. His ﷺ leadership cannot be equated with other politically invented titles in the world like statesman or politician; Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is much more than that as a leader. He ﷺ is a blessing to the entire world and a role model in a true sense.

<sup>20</sup> Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Islamic Concept of Prophethood* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publication translation by Mohiuddin Ahmad, 2023), 132.

<sup>21</sup> Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "The Timelessness of Prophet Muhammad and the Nature of the Virtuous Civilization," *Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World*, Vol. 11 (October 2018): 1.

Along with civilizational development, Prophetic leadership is also a framework for cultural development<sup>22</sup>. Prophet ﷺ was a founder of a culture as well. “Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not invite the people to accept only the creed and law of Islam, but he ﷺ led the foundation of a new way of life which carried the seeds of a new culture and civilization.”<sup>23</sup> The Islamic civilization thrived in art, architecture, literature, and culture because of Prophet Muhammad’s ﷺ emphasis on aesthetic and creative expressions within the bounds of *tawhīd*. This led to the development of unique architectural styles (e.g., mosques) and cultural achievements in poetry and calligraphy.

## Conclusion

The Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ presents a transformative response to the civilizational challenges of the world. His ﷺ moral vision, economic principles, governance model, and approach to interfaith relations remain relevant in addressing contemporary crises. By integrating the Prophet’s teachings into modern societal structures, civilizations can navigate ethical dilemmas, socio-economic disparities, political instability, and religious conflicts. The study of Sīrah is not merely an academic exercise but a practical guide for fostering a just and harmonious global order.

Prophetic leadership offered a comprehensive paradigm that not only guided early Muslims but also laid the foundations for a thriving civilization that spanned continents and centuries. By exemplifying principles such as justice, knowledge, inclusiveness, and moral integrity, the Prophetic ﷺ leadership shaped an Islamic society that valued both material progress and spiritual growth, making it a remarkable civilization in world history. The paper will conclude with some authentic narrations of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to bring home this point of how prophetic Sīrah emphasizes the cultivation of moral and ethical values:

- The best among you are those who have the best manners and character.<sup>24</sup>
- None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.<sup>25</sup>
- Allah is gentle and loves gentleness. He gives for gentleness, what He does not give for harshness, and He does not give anything else like it.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A civilization is supposed to address and satisfy the material, spiritual and cultural needs of the society, if there is imbalance among these the civilization will fall prey to internal crisis.

<sup>23</sup> Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, “The Timelessness of Prophet Muhammad and the Nature of the Virtuous Civilization,” *Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World*, Vol. 11 (October 2018): 83.

<sup>24</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, *Ḥadīth* No. 6029.

<sup>25</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, *Ḥadīth* No. 13; Sahih Muslim, *Ḥadīth* No. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Sahih Muslim, *Ḥadīth* No. 2593.

- The merciful are shown mercy by the Merciful. Be merciful on the earth, and you will be shown mercy from above.<sup>27</sup>
- He is not a believer who eats his fill while his neighbour beside him goes hungry.<sup>28</sup>
- Whoever humbles himself for the sake of Allah, Allah will raise him in status.<sup>29</sup>

These narrations from Prophet ﷺ show the degree of importance that the Sīrah gives to ethical and moral values. The intellectual and spiritual elevation of human society sincerely stands in need of social ethics espoused by the Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Prophetic ethics is a saviour for the spiritual and moral crisis that exists in the world today as it restores the spiritual and moral health of human civilization.

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<sup>27</sup> Sunan al-Tirmidhi, *Ḥadīth* No. 1924.

<sup>28</sup> Sunan al-Kubra by al-Bayhaqi, *Ḥadīth* No. 19049.

<sup>29</sup> Sahih Muslim, *Ḥadīth* No. 2588.

**Endnotes:**

1. Al- Qur'ān, 21:107, Translation from Sahih International.
2. Al- Qur'ān, 62:2, Translation from Sahih International.
3. Al- Qur'ān, 24: 30-31, Translation from Sahih International.
4. Al- Qur'ān, 33:21, Translation from Sahih International.
5. Musnad Aḥmad, Hadith Number 8952.
6. Sahih al-Bukhari, *Ḥadīth* No. 6119.
7. [Sunan Ibn Majah](#), *Ḥadīth* No. 4148.
8. [Sunan Ibn Majah](#), *Ḥadīth* No. 4182.
9. Sunan Abu Dawood, *Ḥadīth* No. 4771.
10. Sahih al-Bukhari, *Ḥadīth* No. 6029.
11. Sahih al-Bukhari, *Ḥadīth* No. 13; Sahih Muslim, *Ḥadīth* No. 45.
12. Sahih Muslim, *Ḥadīth* No. 2593.
13. Sunan al-Tirmidhi, *Ḥadīth* No. 1924.
14. Sunan al-Kubra by al-Bayhaqi, *Ḥadīth* No. 19049.
15. Sahih Muslim, *Ḥadīth* No. 2588.
16. Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Islamic Concept of Prophethood* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.
17. Mawlānā Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, *Religion and Civilization* 4<sup>th</sup> edition.
18. Sayyid Abu A'la Māudūdī, *Islamic Civilization Its Foundation Beliefs and Principles*.
19. Minhaj-us-Sunnah, Vol. III, P. 324 by Ibn Tayyimiyyah.
20. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "The Timelessness of Prophet Muḥammad and the Nature of the Virtuous Civilization," *Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World*.
21. Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, 2006.
22. al- Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah*, 2010.