

The Example of Muhammad

The world events of the early 21st century have put Islam at the forefront of mankind's curiosity and thoughts. Understanding Islam, its tenants, its writings, and its consequences, has become of ultimate importance to charting an acceptable future in the current day and age. Despite substantial amounts of information available in books and journals, as well as on the internet, there are still many misunderstandings about Islam both from inside and outside the religion. What does seem to be clear is that both sides point to the life of Muhammad as a key to understanding Islam.

Egyptian President, Hasmi Mubarak, said in commemoration of Muhammad's birthday that, "the biography of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), is a vivid embodiment of Islam's Message and principles" (Mubarak). The Qur'an itself teaches, "Verily in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example for him who looks unto Allah and the Last Day" (Pickthall, 33:21). Muhammad, in his last message to the people remarked, "I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and my example, the Sunnah and if you follow these you will never go astray" (Muhammad). Modern Muslim advocate Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf states, "Muslims are required to follow the Prophet's precedent (*sunnah*)" (Abdul Rauf, 45). Therefore the ability to understand the true way to live as a Muslim begins with understanding the example of the man Muhammad.

Seeking to use Muhammad as an example, however, can open an even larger number of questions. His life spans approximately 60 years, during which he is orphaned, married, ostracized, adored, victorious, and enriched. How can his life be evaluated in one concise manner in order to give a pattern for living 13 centuries after he did? To see the evidence of a life well lived, it seems as though an evaluation of what is left behind will be the best reflection.

If the statement, “a pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher” is true, then the influence Muhammad had on his followers seems to be a logical basis for the understanding of his example (Bible, Luke 6:40). No student is perfect, and many teachers even seek to have their students surpass them; and one cannot be judged by isolated actions of his disciples. Despite this, a general evaluation of the beliefs and actions of the disciples of Muhammad as a result of their interaction with him should indicate what example they received from him and then acted upon. It is this example that is in turned passed down to the succeeding generations of Muslims.

There are, however, a few problems with discovering his example, known as the sunnah. The first has to do with the time that elapsed between the writing of the hadith, the written record of the Muhammad’s life and teachings, as well as the sira, the biography of Muhammad and his death. Muhammad died in 632 AD. The most widely trusted hadiths are those written by al-Bukhari and his student Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj. Both were born in 810 AD. There is a gap almost 180 years in length between the death of Muhammad and the birth of these authors. This is equivalent to the best biographer of Thomas Jefferson, who died in 1826, being born in 2006. The trustworthiness of the hadith must be questioned on the basis of no first-hand eyewitness accounts. The earliest sira, written by ibn Ishaq, was completed by his death in 765 AD putting it at least 100 years between his writing and the death of Muhammad. None of this work has been found, so all that is known about it is what survives in the work of ibn Hisham written over 60 years later. This means that the earliest written biography and the earliest recorded hadith of Muhammad date more than 200 years after he died. This leads to doubt not only because of the lack of eyewitness testimony and the lack of reliable written records.

A second problem with finding the example of Muhammad is correlated to the first. In

order to collect the material for their writings 200 years after the death of Muhammad, the authors needed to rely mainly on word of mouth testimony. These isnads, records of the chain of information, supposedly give credence to the report of the author by citing reliable people as proof. An example of an isnad from The Life of Muhammad is, “a person above suspicion told me on the authority of ‘Ikrima from b. ‘Abbas and Yazid b. Ruman from ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr saying” (Ibn Ishaq, 290). This type of word of mouth transmission, however, lends itself to confusion over what his example really is. There are times in the sira in which some men say Muhammad ordered one thing and others report he ordered another thing (Ibn Ishaq, 503). With this type of confusion, finding his example is difficult. If a Muslim is seeking to follow the example of Muhammad and his disciples were not sure what he commanded, then they will only be met with frustration. This oral tradition also leads to a possible growth in magnitude of the legends contained in his biography. Mu’adh b. ‘Amr b. al-Jamuh boasts he, “fought the whole of the day dragging my arm behind me and when it became painful to me I put my foot on it and standing on it I tore it off” (Ibn Ishaq, 304). Although b. al-Jamuh may appear brave, medically and logically, it seems to be an exaggeration of the facts. Concerning Muhammad himself, Muhammad’s night journey is an example of how time could aid the growth of oral tradition. Gabriel brings him a winged horse to take to Jerusalem. Once there he ascends into heaven, bargains with Allah for fewer prayers for the people, and leads many former prophets in prayer (Ibn Ishaq, 181-187). In regards to the hadith, ibn Hanbal was one of the early great theologians and a founder of one of the schools of Sunni law. Born in 780, he recorded 1710 traditions of Muhammad from ibn Abbas. Only 50 years earlier, 100 years still after Muhammad died, one scholar had recorded that there were only nine. Approximately 50 years after ibn Hanbal, at the time of al-Bukhari, there are 600,000. Al-Bukhari keeps only 7,397 judging that 99% of the

hadiths regarding Muhammad were not true (Lingel, Oct 11, 2005). In about one century, the hadiths grew from 9 to 600,00 and were then pared down to 7,397. Variances are even mentioned in the Sahih Muslim. He writes, “This hadith has been transmitted on the authority of Musa b. 'Uqba but with a slight variation of wording” (Muslim, 36.6608). This leads to immense difficulties for the person trying to find the example of Muhammad. If the example of Muhammad is the measuring stick for Muslims, then without the clear demarcation of liable hadiths, the calibration of the stick is unknowable.

If the hadith and sira are to be taken as true, the attitude of Muhammad’s disciples toward his example is best summarized by statement attributed to ‘Abdullah b. Jahsh, “to hear is to obey” as he read instructions from his master (Ibn Ishaq, 287). From Muhammad’s orders, ‘Abdullah b. Jahsh and his companions spy on the Quraysh people; when they are discovered, they kill some of the non-combatant people during the holy month. At this time, Muhammad does not reprimand them, but instead receives a message from God that allows for the killings. The reason given by God is that although engaging in war during the holy month “is a serious matter, . . . keeping people from the way of God and disbelieving in Him and in the sacred mosque and driving out His people there from is more serious with God” (Ibn Ishaq, 287-288). Here, early in the rulership of Muhammad, breaking of the law is rationalized by a timely ‘revelation’ from Allah. The lesson taught and learned is that of convenience. Although something may have been commanded to be wrong, if it is helpful to his cause, then it can be rationalized in the name of Allah at a later time. In relation to violence, the lessons continued.

In the sira, there are many examples of the cruelty of his disciples. Ali executed a polytheist in front of Muhammad without repercussion after the battle of Badr (Ibn Ishaq, 337). Muhammad’s followers kill a woman by tearing her in two between two camels (Ibn Ishaq, 665).

The hadith also contains examples of violence by his disciples. In the approach to the battle of Badr, his disciples grab a Quraysh slave. When he will not give them the information they want, they beat him until he talks to them (Muslim, Book 19, No. 4394). Abu Bakr, one of the first believers in Muhammad's prophethood, the father of his favorite wife 'Aisha, and the first Caliph after Muhammad's death, punched 'Aisha in the face as Muhammad slept in her lap (al-Bukhari, Vol. 8, Book 82, No. 828). These actions could be written off as rogue actions of individual followers, if it were not for Muhammad's condonement of and participation in actions such as these.

In the sira, Usama b. Zayd killed a man who pronounced the *shahada*, the Islamic statement of faith (Ibn Ishaq, 667). Muhammad, in numerous accounts, pronounced that Muslim who kills another Muslim cannot attain forgiveness (Pickthall, 4.93; Muslim, 41.6898). Despite these clear statements against killing Muslims, Muhammad makes Usama feel guilty and then forgives him when Usama promises not to do it again after Muhammad dies (Ibn Ishaq, 667). One evening, two of Muhammad's men killed a one-eyed shepherd while he was sleeping. His crime was stating he would never become a Muslim. When the men returned to Muhammad they told him what happened, and Muhammad blessed them (Ibn Ishaq, 674-675). His condonement and approval send a powerful relativistic message. On the other hand, Muhammad must allow these crimes to go unpunished because he has perpetrated crimes like these himself.

When Muhammad ordered 'Uqba to be killed, he asked, "But who will look after my children, O Muhammad?" to which the 'compassionate' leader responded: "Hell" (Ibn Ishaq, 308). After his tribe converts to Islam, Zuhayr Abu Surad asks for mercy from Muhammad on behalf of his tribe. Muhammad 'mercifully' grants the tribe a choice: they can have their sons and wives returned to them or they can retain their cattle. In order to uphold their honor, the

tribe chooses their families (Ibn Ishaq, 592). The tribe of Bani Qurayza was accused by Muhammad of siding with the Meccans in the Battle of the Trench. As a result, he judged them by condemning their men to die and their women and children to be taken as plunder. Muhammad took 600-700 men out of the city and had them beheaded (Ibn Ishaq, 461-462, al-Bukhari 4.280). When his men took Mecca, they were to capture anyone who surrendered except for ten people who were to be executed regardless of surrender. These people had personally offended Muhammad, goaded his children's camel so they fell off, and committed other such 'serious' offenses (Ibn Ishaq, 550-551). Muhammad sends Jarir out, with 150 horsemen, to exterminate a group of people who he knew from the preislamic times (al-Bukhari, 5.59.641). As with anyone else, Muhammad's desire for revenge stems from pride and selfishness, not from a willing desire to rule a peaceful realm. This pridefulness also brings into question his own desire to worship Allah. Sura 2:173 says, "Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (Pickthall). A lack of forgiveness and mercy does not exemplify the positive qualities of Allah to those he has been called to be an example.

Muhammad also ordered many raids, many of them simply for money. Time and again, he went out, or he sent his men out, to steal from caravans not for the cause of Islam, but to increase his power and wealth (Ibn Ishaq, 285, 316, 364, 445, 532, 660). In total, he participated in or commanded at least 61 raids and battles on the towns and the caravans of both his enemies and the innocent. However, even Muhammad had his limits. After the seizing of Mecca, the killing appears to become even too much for Muhammad. The day after the battle, his men surround Ibn al-Athwa', who had killed a Muslim, and one of his disciples, Khuza'a kills him in the streets. Muhammad comment, "stop this killing, Khuza'a; there has been too much killing

even if there were profit in it” (Ibn Ishaq, 554). These few examples, taken from different sources, show Muhammad’s character to be one of not only allowing violence and cruelty.

Part of his promotion of cruelty and war is displayed through his disciples’ attitude towards martyrdom. Ibn Ishaq records that after the battles of Badr and Uhud, some were still waiting for martyrdom because they desired the rewards of Allah once it was accomplished (Ibn Ishaq, 468). ‘Abdullah b. Rawaha inspired troops during the raid of Mu’ta by telling them not to be afraid of death since that is how they may be rewarded. He closed his appeal by saying: “both prospects are fine: victory or martyrdom” (Ibn Ishaq, 533). ‘Urwa said that his death, “is a gift which God has honoured me with and a martyrdom which God has led me to” (Ibn Ishaq, 614). ‘Uma asks, “O Allah! Grant me martyrdom in Your cause, and let my death be in the city of Your Apostle” (al-Bukhari, 3.30.114). Fighting was seen as preferable to a life of peace and tranquility by some disciples (Ibn Ishaq, 620). In fact, some were said to have the desire to come back from the dead simply to die a second time in the cause of Allah (Ibn Ishaq, 400). Such devotion to one’s society would be admirable, if it were not for the manner in which these martyrs gained their deaths. Along with these oddities, there is the striking contrast between martyrdom through attack and the martyrdom through persecution. Muhammad’s disciples did not die a martyr’s death because they defended their faith or even their territory, they died inflicting misery on others.

Muhammad though, through his words, had made it clear what awaited martyrs. He was, allegedly ready to face martyrdom himself. Al-Bukhari records him saying, “I would have loved to be martyred in Allah's cause and then made alive, and then martyred and then made alive, and then again martyred in His cause” (al-Bukhari, 1.2.35). The Qur’an gives a promise to

the martyrs:

Lo! Allah hath bought from the believers their lives and their wealth because the Garden will be theirs: they shall fight in the way of Allah and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an. Who fulfilleth His covenant better than Allah? Rejoice then in your bargain that ye have made, for that is the supreme triumph. (Pickthall, 9.111)

The message to his followers is clear, if a Muslim fights and dies for the cause of Allah, he will be guaranteed entrance into Paradise. Sura 4.74 also promises eternal life to the martyr. In the Sira, Muhammad assures his followers multiple times that if they die the death of a martyr, they will enter Paradise (Ibn Ishaq, 300, 385, 395, 519, 643). The hadith puts Jihad as one of the most significant good deeds a believer can do. As Muhammad is asked, "what is the best deed?" he answers belief in Allah and Muhammad; but as for the second, he answers, "to participate in Jihad in Allah's Cause" (al-Bukhari, 1.2.25). Not only then is Jihad a guarantee of eternity in Paradise (the only way to be assured in Islam), but the martyr is also credited with good works. The reward waiting for the martyr is not just Paradise itself, beautiful untouched women await them as well (Pickthall, 56.70-74).

The hadiths are replete with rewards for the martyr as well. In the Sahih Muslim it is written, "The souls, of the martyrs live in the bodies of green birds who have their nests in chandeliers hung from the throne of the Almighty" (20.461). Although this is not quite the Paradise most would think of when contemplating it, the martyr can look forward to such an existence. Oddly enough though, there is more than one way to martyrdom for Muslims. According to al-Bukhari, "Five are regarded as martyrs: They are those who die because of plague, abdominal disease, drowning or a falling building etc., and the martyrs in Allah's Cause" (4.52.82). This seems to make martyrdom much less appealing. Would Muhammad or his

followers return to life after their first martyrdom just to get the plague? Or to drown? The Muwatta of al-Malik adds dying in a burning building, from pneumonia, and during childbirth as more ways to be considered a martyr and guarantee entry into Paradise (al-Malik, 16.12.36). Although these are other ways to become a martyr, the main martyrdom discussed in history and in the 21st Century comes from *jihad*.

Jihad is the Arabic word for “to strive” or “to struggle.” In modernity it has become synonymous with the radical Islamic fight against Western Civilization. In Osama bin Laden’s “Letter to American People,” he warns America to, “not await anything from us but Jihad, resistance and revenge” (bin Laden). Many say, however, that this is not the picture of *jihad* that Islam’s founder Muhammad intended to promote during his life. The sira and the hadith tell a different story though. The ‘struggle’ includes using force to gain power and money, as well as to ostensibly bring people to Islam. Muhammad and his men tell others they will be beheaded or attacked if they do not repent and become Muslims (Ibn Ishaq, 547, 562, 646). Despite the ferociousness of this policy, many times Muhammad gave people options. Before the Battle of Khaibar, he tells ‘Ali to, “go to them patiently” and “invite them to Islam” (al-Bukhari, 4.52.253). With Banu L-Harith he takes it one step further and gives the people three days to consider his invitation (Ibn Ishaq, 645). He was, however, not always murderous, he was also willing to bribe people into conversion. He offered Malik his family, his property, and 100 camels if he would convert (Ibn Ishaq, 593). The striving on behalf of Allah even continues to Muhammad’s last command to, “not let two religions be left in the Arabian Peninsula” (Ibn Ishaq, 689). This command, and its completion by ‘Umar, is also recorded in the hadith (al-Bukhari, 4.53.288 & 380). Muhammad’s command to strive against all non-Muslims is not the message that the world or most Muslims want to convey today, but his example is undeniable.

The results of Muhammad's jihadic campaigns were three fold. First he could gain power and wealth through conquering even if some became believers; second, the deaths of many who did not repent; and third, an example was established for his followers. His immediate disciples heard his message and sought to obey. Thabit said that Muslims will, "fight men until they believe in God" (Ibn Ishaq, 629). Abu Bakr taught the same thing to a converted Christian as he instructed: "God sent Muhammad with this religion and he strove for it until men accepted it voluntarily or by force" (Ibn Ishaq, 669). This is an interesting testimony for a religion which also believes in the prophet Jesus, whom Muslims believe was also a prophet of Allah, though not equal with Muhammad. Jesus commanded those who followed him to, "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Bible, Matt. 28:19). Muhammad himself cursed the Christians and the Jews for building too close to graveyards (al-Bukhari 1.8.427). He also wanted all the Jews to be killed (Muslim, 41.6981). Muhammad believed God told him to "seize," "besiege," and "kill" all polytheists and anyone who would not become Muslim (Ibn Ishaq, 618). The example and the result are clear. If Muhammad conducted his life this way and allowed his followers to learn and act in this manner, then it is obvious what lessons he was teaching. It is very clear why many Muslims seeking to follow the example of Muhammad see "Jihad, resistance, and revenge" as a way of life. He taught intolerance and violence towards those who were not Muslims.

The Qur'an states:

Sanction is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged; and Allah is indeed Able to give them victory; Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: Our Lord is Allah - For had it not been for Allah's repelling some men by means of others, cloisters and churches and oratories and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft mentioned, would

assuredly have been pulled down. Verily Allah helpeth one who helpeth Him. Lo! Allah is Strong, Almighty – (Pickthall, 22:39-40)

Imam Abdul Rauf interprets this passage to mean, “that the objective of fighting must be, first, defensive and, second, to establish a pluralistic religious society, where God’s name is extolled in all languages” (Abdul Rauf, 137). This modern interpretation of jihad does not coincide with his statement quoted earlier, “Muslims are required to follow the Prophet’s precedent (*sunnah*)” (Abdul Rauf, 45). Imam Abdul Rauf, and Muslims as a whole, are left in a difficult quandary. If Muslims reject the Quranic injunction to only fight when attacked or for religious freedom, then Muhammad and the Muslim Khilafah of the 1300 years following him are displeasing to God. Muhammad clearly, from the sira and the hadith, raided for money and killed to ‘invite’ people to Islam. His words and actions did not accept believers of other religions unless they turned to Islam first. However, if Muhammad’s example, and that of his disciples, should be emulated, then the Qur’an is wrong. Since the Qur’an is written on eternal tablets, it cannot be wrong, therefore it must be the example of Muhammad which is at fault (Pickthall, 85:21-22).

Many Muslims through the ages have adopted the transmission of this message from Muhammad to his immediate followers. In the 30 years following the death of Muhammad, the Islamic Conquest took over not only the Arabian Peninsula but also the northeastern coast of Africa and most of the Middle East. By 120 years after his death, they added the entire northern coast of Africa, Spain, and the Middle East to India. By the height of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century, they also now controlled the whole of Southeast Asia, taken southeastern Europe, including modern day Turkey and Greece, and conquered the northern half of the African continent (Brice). With this geographic expansion came an expansion in atrocities as well. In the centuries that followed, the persecution of others for religious, monetary, and political power

continued, although the popular view of the empire is one of tolerance (Ottoman Empire). In 1683, an Austrian village was burn downed, its inhabitants enslaved, its sick executed, and its churches desecrated. In the 19th Century, almost 400,00 Christians in the empire were exterminated for their beliefs. In the first 15 years of the 20th century, 1,750,000 Armenian and Assyrian Christians executed for their faith, while 200,000 who ‘repented’ and turned to Islam were spared (Khilafah Critique, 1). The lessons of their founder, Muhammad, carried almost 1300 years into the future as Muslims sought to follow the ‘repent or die’ example he had left for them in his sunnah. To believe that Muhammad was a prophet who stood for peace and for the well being of those who were not Muslims is not just naïve, but patently false. From his first military campaign against Badr in 622 until he died, he personally took part in 27 battles and raids and ordered 38 others for his followers to carryout (Ibn Ishaq, 659-660). His example gave Muslims until the early 20th Century a model by which to live and rule. Some Muslims today, those in the vein of bin Laden, call the West to Islam calling it:

the religion of Unification of God, sincerity, the best of manners, righteousness, mercy, honour, purity, and piety. It is the religion of showing kindness to others, establishing justice between them, granting them their rights, and defending the oppressed and the persecuted. It is the religion of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil with the hand, tongue and heart. It is the religion of Jihad in the way of Allah so that Allah's Word and religion reign Supreme. (bin Laden)

These Muslims see no contradiction in the peace they offer and the threats they use to bring others into submission. They promote the same values that Muhammad himself lived and exemplified.

This model of his life also extended to the accumulation of wealth by force. As a result of

the culture of greed he created, at one point his disciples demanded Muhammad divide the booty from the Hawazin so strongly they forced him back against a tree to incite him to action (Ibn Ishaq, 594). Some of his disciples sang that Muhammad lead them on raids which yielded much treasure and slaves (Ibn Ishaq, 625 & 627). In fact, one of his believers says in a poem, “What a successful raid we had! Mules, and horses and asses. . . If I could satisfy the rancour I feel I should not care whether they were Muslims or heathen” (Ibn Ishaq, 642). Here is a follower of Muhammad, taking the example of his leader and musing that he did not care who he plundered, whether Muslim or pagan, as long as he is obtained the intoxication of wealth. Although many, like Abdul Rauf, could not imagine this being a direct result of the example of Muhammad, it is.

Muhammad condemned greed and laughed when he saw it. After conquering Khyabar, one of his disciples took plunder and would not share it with the others, instead of condemning the selfishness, Muhammad laughed and told him he could keep it, thus promoting selfish behavior (Ibn Ishaq, 516). Muhammad himself displayed selfishness after the raid of Khaybar. According to the sira, the spoil was divided up with a fifth going to Allah, a fifth to orphans and the poor, a fifth to the maintenance of emissaries, a fifth to Muhammad himself, and a fifth to taking care of Muhammad’s wives (Ibn Ishaq, 521). The ill-gotten plunder received in the raid was divided in such a way as to give the poor and Muhammad’s wives an equal portion. The leader of Islam communicates to his people, through his sunnah, that greedily taking care of his numerous wives was just as important as taking care of the poor. This does not seem to be the type of leadership that anyone, in particular Muslims, should emulate. For a modern culture that ostensibly seeks peace and condemns selfishness, Muhammad’s example fails to leave a relevant model.

The manner and material of Muhammad’s seizures is also leaves an unsatisfactory

example. After the raid on Banu al-Mustaliq, Muhammad divides up the plunder, including women, amongst his people. He then hears about Juwayriya who was a newly plundered slave. She was also extremely beautiful. Muhammad buys her back from her subject and takes her as a wife (Ibn Ishaq, 493). He gives a woman as plunder, buys her back because of her beauty, and then marries her to satisfy his selfishness. As he took more women as plunder, he took more wives as well (Ibn Ishaq, 511). Muhammad married at least 15 women during his lifetime, but in Sura 4:3 Allah instructs that a man should have no more than four wives. Muhammad has a timely revelation from Allah, in Sura 33:50-51, which gives him permission to fulfill his pleasures with all the women he wishes. 'Aisha, his favorite wife with whom he consummated their relationship when she was nine, is reported to have said, "It seems to me that your Lord hastens to satisfy your desire" in response to his numerous wives (Muslim, 8.3453). It seems that 'Aisha had some insight to the reasons for Muhammad's revelation, but maybe not on the source.

Muhammad's attitudes and actions regarding looting is interesting considering that the taking of prisoners and plunder was against God's commands. The sira records that, "God reproached him about the prisoners and the taking of booty, no other prophets before him having taken booty from his enemy." Muhammad then received another revelation from God that plundering was now lawful, but only under the prophet Muhammad's command (Ibn Ishaq, 326). Muhammad was able to take money and wives, which was forbidden for all others, without impunity because he was God's special and last messenger (Muslim, 20.4543). Calling himself the last prophet is a convenient way to ensure his power and his legacy. Muhammad used revelations from Allah to excuse his actions and to solidify his power, therefore codifying the example of his life for his followers. Of course they will always follow the one who calls

himself the ‘last’ or greatest prophet and never seek after another one or a better one, if he fills their fields with livestock and their homes with slaves.

As the example of Muhammad is examined, it is clear that it is not a model for a life that is honoring to any good God, let alone a model for 21st century living. From his treatment of enemies, women, unbelievers to the satisfaction of his monetary and sexual desires, Muhammad lived a life that was not an example of peace, but that of a medieval warlord. He treated his enemies with the utmost cruelty. He willingly killed those who acted disrespectfully towards him, tortured those who opposed him, and terrorized all those who stood against him. His example of how to treat women was also reprehensible. Muhammad fulfilled his selfish desires exploiting their beauty, while treating those he captures like property. As for Christians, Jews, polytheists, and pagans, Muhammad had not tolerance. He claims God cursed the Jewish “liars” who claimed they killed Jesus (Ibn Ishaq, 277). Muhammad cursed both Jews and Christians and claims to be ordered by God to kill all the polytheists (Ibn Ishaq, 618). Anyone who did not repent was subject to death. This does not fit into even the broadest definition of tolerance that might be used today, yet Muslims still claim Muhammad is a timeless example for their lives. If so, it is incumbent upon them to explain how Muhammad’s sunnah relates to the world today. It also implies that the lives many Muslims are living today do not intersect with the way of Muhammad and are therefore not following the commands to do so in the Qur’an, the hadith, or the sira. His selfishness with women and possessions may have allowed him to rule on the 7th century Arabian Peninsula, but this is a kinder and gentler world. His violent actions and commands and his selfish fulfillment of desires do not qualify him as the greatest example for Muslims, or anyone else, today.

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