

Positive Thinking and Action in Islam: Case Studies from the Sirah of Prophet Muhammad

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Abstract

The Prophets are embodiments of positive thinking and positive action. This was a necessity for the fulfillment of their mission. Their relationship with God and the resulting knowledge and understanding of the universe strengthened their capacity in regards to positive thinking and action. This work analyses three cases which capture the positive thinking and positive action style of Prophet Muhammad. These include his relationships with two great enemies of Muslims, Khalid ibn Walid, Abu Sufyan, and the young Abu Mahzurah who mocked an Islamic symbol. The Prophet's interaction and mention of these people are guides to how Muslims should respond to negativity and hatred. This article argues that a solid understanding of the Prophet's positive thought and action is lacking within many Muslims, and this in turn leads to great misunderstandings and misapplications of faith.

Keywords: Positive thinking, Prophet Muhammed, Islam, sunnah, negative thinking

Introduction

The Prophets are embodiments of positive thinking and positive action¹. This was a necessity for the fulfillment of their mission. Their relationship with God and the resulting knowledge and understanding of the universe strengthened their capacity in regards to positive thinking and action. There is a strong correlation between the two. The deeper a person's understanding of the macrocosm, also known as the book of the universe, and the microcosm, which is the human being,² the greater his or her degree of positive thinking. This can, in turn, lead to success in worldly and spiritual affairs.

Positive thinking and positive action are essential features of all prophetic traditions. This can be seen in the respective successes of Moses and Aaron against the Pharaoh, Jesus and his disciples in spreading his message, and Prophet Muhammad and his Companions in conveying Islam to three continents in the relatively short time span of half a century.

One practical application of the macrocosm and microcosm is thinking and acting positively in every situation. The prophets avoided engaging in reactionary behavior and carefully thought out their actions. Moreover, they worked in order to build something good or heal wounds as opposed to destroying what they disliked.

A thorough examination of historical sources on Prophet Muhammad's life reveals his dedication to thinking and acting positively. He did not fight fear with fear, but rather directed people's fear towards a righteous cause: fearing the displeasure of the Compassionate One who created them out of love. He did not fight hatred with hatred, but rather redirected people's negative feelings towards a worthier cause: decreasing the propagation of evil. Instead of envying the worldly goods or positions of others, he directed people to compete with each other for the common good. The strength of Prophet Muhammad's message, which transformed Arabia, was due to his way of life. His actions were exemplary in every respect and always came prior to his words.

¹FethullahGülen, *VeGaybın Son Habercisi*, KDD, YeniÜmit,(Istanbul,2003) p. 3-5

²According to Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) a human is a microcosm of the universe. See William Chittick, "Ibn Arabi", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/ibn-arabi/>

The goal of positive action is not just physical, such as ending conflict, but also spiritual. It consists mainly in bringing a person closer to his or her primordial nature, which detests evil and desires good. Scholars of Islam classified the prophetic traditions according to various degrees of importance, ranging from required to optional and from frequently to rarely depending on how often the Prophet performed or encouraged others to perform those traditions. In this article, I argue that at the core of all prophetic traditions are positive thinking and positive action which I would call “the essence of all sunnah or strategic sunnah”.

This article first examines how through positive action, animosity was transformed by the prophets into pity and then utilized to effect hearts and minds. It reflects on how their actions were oriented in order to achieve long term peace as opposed to short term satisfaction with consequent negative feelings. This led to change within Arabian society whose values were based on tribalistic loyalty and fanaticism as opposed to dedication to moral values and the greater good. The second aim of this article is to analyze from the philosophical perspectives of the *Sirah* (the biography of the Prophet) three major cases at the time of Prophet Muhammed from primary historical sources as examples of positive thinking and action. It is important to understand how the Prophet and His Companions responded to countless attacks, assassination attempts, a social and economic embargo, oppression and persecution, exile and ruthless killings. In Arabian society at that time, there were two types of response: either to respond in the same or worse manner or to remain silent and accept the oppression due to weakness. This was to be a lifelong course as it was part of the culture.³ However, the Prophet forged a third path, one that was not based on revenge or acceptance. His goal was to revive people, not to kill them.⁴ He was aware of the built up frustration and anger within the Muslim community and did not ignore it or let it loose in the form of violence. This could have manifested itself in the form of reactionary responses and consequent civil conflict. However, instead he redirected these potential energies in order to encourage productive and positive actions, which were mainly directed towards the transformation of society for the common good.

In Islamic theology, the prophets were leading examples in this regard, not only guiding people in how to survive difficult times, but also how to thrive and succeed. The key to the prophets’ success lies not only in their preaching, but notably in the exemplary character of their lives⁵ which never failed to attract attention. The primary goal for positive action is spiritual improvement. Positive action is more conducive to spiritual enlightenment, inner peace and worldly harmony than reactionary responses, both on individual and community levels. Prophet Muhammad’s example throughout his life demonstrates this goal. His main objective was the pleasure of God. His methods were informed by positive thinking and action. Furthermore, he did not veer from this path throughout his years as a leader which witnessed the social transformation of a tribalistic and barbaric society.

Prophet Muhammad’s life has been examined, re-examined and reviewed by countless scholars, each seeking to better understand the life and philosophy of this transformative leader. Each strove to uncover a new interpretation of the Prophet’s example according to his or her time in order that the people might benefit and prosper. When the activity of learning and researching declined in the Muslim world, the quality of publications declined as well. Instead of new views and understandings, there were recycled works, which were hardly a guiding light as they hung in the shadows of previous works. Consequently, there was particular weakness in the area of understanding the philosophy of *Sirah*. This coincided with the general decline of the Muslim world economically, politically and socially.

For these reasons, it is necessary to revisit the examples set by the Prophet in order to produce fresh interpretations required for the present times. However, this will not be a feat achievable by a single scholar. Due to the increase in volume of knowledge and its academic specialization, a massive team of scholars is needed. Just to understand the Prophet’s positive thinking philosophy, the team requires several religious scholars, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, historians and psychologists.

³Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kāmil fi al-tārīkh*, Matbayi Azhariyya (Egypt, 1963), v. 1, pp. 502-687

⁴FethullahGulen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammed*, <http://fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-works/faith/prophet-muhammad/24808-a-general-evaluation-of-his-military-achievements> retrieved 25/12/2015

⁵FethullahGulen, *Prizma 1*, Nil yayinlari, (Izmir ,2011)pp. 83–4; FethullahGulen, *Ruhumuzun Heykelini Dikerken*, Nil Yayinlari, (Izmir,2011) pp. 33

The combination of all these scientists' interpretations can lead to a greater understanding of his positive thinking and positive action philosophy, which can then make people better equipped at applying his example according to the needs of the post-modern era.

The Muslim world has been in crisis since the mid-19th century coinciding with the peak of European colonization and Industrial Revolution. Colonization led both to the exploitation of the Muslim world, as well as inferiority complexes in many Muslim societies, as Europe rose in its grandeur while the Muslim world lagged behind in sciences, technology, economy and military power. It became crippled with the rise in internal conflicts, oppression by authority and social problems, mainly as a result of the harsh imbalance of power between East and West, but also as a consequence of failing to innovate and renew what had once made it great. This has led to a wounded mentality among Muslim communities at large. Societies in such conditions produce either radicals who cause great harm, or apathetic and pessimistic generations. However, there are always some within those oppressed conditions who are better able to better diagnose problems and believe in the power of strategic solutions. Unlike radicals who can be reactionary, the positive thinkers are more proactive, utilizing even the negative energy of their surroundings for better outcomes.

In their age of crisis, Muslims are facing three major issues: ignorance, poverty and disunity.⁶ More than ever, in the colonial and postcolonial eras there is a need for positive action. However, rather than tackling major problems through positive action, which involves strategic thinking after careful study of the universe and its creatures, the Muslim world has instead responded reactively to them. The general direction of the Muslim world is therefore at odds with the example of positive action philosophy of Prophet Muhammad, who led the Muslims out of dire situations in his time against a great enemy, which is not dissimilar to what the Muslims feel they are facing now. While the Prophet focused heavily on internal factors and strength building, especially in his earlier years as a prophet, the Muslim world has not succeeded in addressing internal issues, focusing more on pressing external factors. Moreover, due to a lack of understanding of the universe and human nature in all its forms, their methodology tended to be weak or ineffective, if not outright incorrect, in addressing issues. Often times, this lead to further complications.

Considering these difficulties, a comprehension of the *Sirah* philosophy can serve the Muslims well, for correct *usool*(methodology) is vital to effective positive action. Just as each branch in the Islamic sciences has its own methodology, so should *Sirah* have its own methodology. Moreover, methodologies cannot be stagnant or unchanging. Just like people and eras, they too must adapt to the changing times without veering from their base or core principles of faith.

Ignorance or lack of proper understanding of *usool* and the philosophy of *Sirah* has led to even greater problems, such as an excessive focus on the literal meaning of Islamic sources, or outward appearance as a major determiner of faith. These are major causes of the internal weakness of Muslims which must be addressed in order to deal with larger external problems. This has been done in previous centuries by Muslim leaders and scholars, particularly in Medieval times.⁷ Previous approaches to this problem must be researched and analyzed thoroughly in order to create a solution suited to contemporary times.

Is the Sirah Understood Properly by Muslims?

Historian Montgomery Watt stated that no great figure in history was “so poorly appreciated in the West” as Muhammad.⁸ This is not a Western problem alone. In the East, it cannot be said that Prophet Muhammad's teaching and philosophy is entirely understood in its modern-day applications and appreciated accordingly.

Until the 16th century, scholars such as Ibn Ishaq (d.768), at-Tabari (838-923), al-Ghazzali(1058-1111), Ibn Asakir (1105-1175), Ibn Khaldun(1332-1406) and many others grasped his life's philosophy and based their works on this understanding and on the needs of their time. Their works exerted an influence over the general leadership and scholarly community. This can be considered a factor in their success as leaders of great civilizations as they applied Islamic philosophy and principles in accordance with their respective leadership styles.

⁶Sükran Vahide, *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Sozler Publications (Istanbul, 1992)pp. 95

⁷See Salih Yucel, The notion of “Husnu'lZann” or positive thinking in Islam: A Medieval perspective, the *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 4 No. 7, 2014,p 101-112,

⁸Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Clarendon Press, (Oxford, 1953) pp.52

This includes working to make alliances and friendships as opposed to reacting to enemies, and accepting and building upon a pluralistic society as opposed to forming an exclusive regime and society. There was a general understanding that a leader should prefer simplicity over luxury and act only after consulting with knowledgeable people. This loss of understanding of *Sirah* has been a factor enabling the rise of dictatorships, forms of corruption and reactionary groups, including extremists.

Positive thinking and action is a core principle of the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. From the early days of Islam when the Prophet and Muslims were oppressed, to the time when the Prophet was the head of state in Madinah, to the days when he conquered Makkah without bloodshed, positive thought and action were unwavering principles. He recognized the intense emotions within the oppressed Muslims and transformed those potentially dangerous feelings to pity and compassion as well as a source of motivation to work for the common good. When the Makkans were expecting a bloody revenge as dictated by tribal customs, they faced instead a conquest of their hearts and minds.

This is where some modern-day ideological and extremist groups, including Muslims, misuse what could be potential catalysts for positive actions. They do not seek to utilize the internal tensions within their societies to promote the common good, but rather use them in their raw form to propagate narrow political ideologies encouraging retribution or reaction through violent forms of opposition.

The aim of positive thought and action is to win over hearts and minds. The prophets are the pinnacle of this philosophy. Some visionaries choose to ignore the past as a way of starting fresh while others drown in polemics and resentment as a way of responding to injustice, but they too are also unable to go beyond the past. The prophets, including Prophet Muhammad, took the middle way with their positive practices. Accordingly, they acknowledged the pain and injustice experienced by the believers, but they constantly worked for a brighter future through their firm faith in God. They understood that ignoring historical injustices would insult the dignity of their followers and that living in anger and resentment would only lead to regression and back-and-forth violence. Their role was above all to build a civilized society, which in turn would be a source of future civilizations.

With a great mission in hand, Prophet Muhammad had to serve as a role model⁹ for not only his people, but for all humanity. He came from an honored tribe and was respected throughout Makkah prior to and even during his prophethood, yet he underwent such horrendous acts to his person, his family and his Companions, that it is difficult to conceive how he could have responded in the manner he did.¹⁰ According to the centuries-old tribal laws, he had every right to seek revenge as long as he had the strength to do so,¹¹ yet he never responded to personal attacks or rashly reacted to attacks on the fledgling Muslim community. He dealt with slander and many forms of verbal and physical harassment that could easily provoke a person to anger, such as the time when a man spat on his face¹² which the Prophet ignored. He and his family and Muslims faced starvation during the three-year embargo¹³ while his two daughters were forced to divorce their husbands.¹⁴ His life was always under risk due to various assassination attempts, whether by poisoning, secret plots or direct attacks. He was forced to flee his beloved home out of certain fear for his safety. He remained an exile for up to eight years, unable to return even for the holy pilgrimage which tribal laws normally permitted. He was still not safe in Medina¹⁵ but was safer compared to being in Makka.

Over 23 years, Prophet Muhammad dealt with over 40 assassination attempts according to primary Islamic history sources. This number does not include the battles he had to take part in.

Some assassins were captured, but even then the Prophet forgave the persons and those behind the act. Many if not all the assassins eventually became Muslims, spreading the Prophet's good reputation to their fellow tribe members, many of whom in turn either decreased their hate towards the Muslims or even became Muslims over time. In the land of eye for an eye, forgiving an assassin was an unimaginable deed.

⁹Qur'an 33:21

¹⁰Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqâtü'l-Kübrâ*, (Beirut, 1957) v. 3, pp. 233, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, (Egypt, 1954) v. 1, pp. 404

¹¹Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kâmil* v.1, p. 502-687

¹²Ibn Ishaq, *İbn Hisham, Sirah*, (Beirut, 1971) v.1, pp.387

¹³Ibn Ishaq, *İbn Hisham, Sirah*, v. 1, p. 375

¹⁴Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, v. 8, pp. 3 6-3 7

¹⁵Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, v. 6, pp.140-141,

There was and still is no similar precedent in any known chapter of Arab history. In terms of tribal traditions, choosing not to seek revenge was considered highly shameful and a dishonor on the entire tribe's reputation.

Had the Prophet sought justice for himself, he may not have been able to convey a strong example of mercy and forgiveness. He knew that whatever needed to be changed outwardly in society first needed to be changed inwardly and then manifested by himself. However, the example he set could not be a mere relative improvement over the norm. He needed to be excellent in all aspects of life, whether it was in his generosity, his extremely simple lifestyle or his unwavering dedication to the commands of God.

This work analyses Prophet Muhammad's positive thought and action in his relationship and interactions with three key people in Islamic history: Khalid ibn Walid (592-642), Abu Sufyan (560-652) and Abu Mahzurah. Khalid ibn Walid was a commander who fought against the Muslims, but came to accept Islam and led the Muslims in battle. Abu Sufyan was the leader of the polytheist Makkans and the greatest of the Prophet's enemies to survive and even join the Muslims. Abu Mahzurah is a lesser known polytheist whose mocking of the Islamic call to prayer led to his eventual acceptance of Islam.

Khalid ibn Walid: From Killer of Muslims to Military Leader of Muslims

Before accepting Islam, Khalid ibn Walid was one of the strongest opponents and enemies of Prophet Muhammad and Muslims. For 17 years, he persecuted or supported the persecution of Muslims. He took part in all the anti-Muslim campaigns, including two major battles. In the Battle of Uhud, he was responsible for the death of more than 70 Muslims due to his experience and prowess in the battlefield as a soldier and commander. There were only 600 Muslims taking part in this battle, wherein they incurred the loss of the Prophet Muhammad's uncle, Hamza, who was one of the Muslims' greatest supporters and particularly feared by the enemy. Although Prophet Muhammad lost his beloved uncle who supported the Muslims through all endeavors, he never spoke ill of Khalid and even commented on Khalid's fighting skills to Khalid's Muslim brother. He also added, "**A man like Khalid, can't keep himself away from Islam for long,**"¹⁶

After 17 years of harming the Muslims, Khalid went with little fear to Muhammad and announced his desire to join the Muslims. In the tribalistic society of Arabia, Khalid could have been killed if he approached the group of people he fought against. However, the Muslims had transformed their society from one governed by tribalism to one which was highly civilized. Such was the influence of Prophet Muhammad's positive thinking and action on them. As Khalid and his friend arrived in Madinah, Muslims had every opportunity to see revenge for the loss of their loved ones and for being persecuted and expelled, but they did not even utter any harsh words or warnings towards either Khalid or his companion who was equally regarded as an enemy. When Prophet Muhammad heard Khalid was coming, he was even pleased and smiling as Khalid approached him¹⁷. He said of Khalid and his friend who came with him, "Makkah has given its precious ones to Madinah."¹⁸ Upon Khalid's acceptance of Islam, Prophet Muhammad arranged for Khalid to stay at an abode next to his own.¹⁹

Khalid felt regret over his past actions and asked Muhammad to pray for his forgiveness for he had taken part in every battle and campaign against the Muslims. In response, Prophet Muhammad told Khalid, "All sins are forgiven upon acceptance of Islam" and prayed to God to forgive Khalid for all his prior sins²⁰.

So great was Muhammad's acceptance of Khalid, that Khalid said, "By God, ever since I became Muslim, the Messenger of God did not keep me away from any significant matters."²¹ He was consulted on many issues, and within two months was appointed commander of an army. Throughout his life, the Prophet never spoke a word or made a gesture against Khalid ibn Walid.

This was not only an attitude taken on by Muhammad. The Companions never mentioned Khalid's past life and, after his success in aiding the Muslims at battles, viewed Khalid as a hero. To this day, Khalid is praised as a Companion despite the sadness still felt over the loss at the Battle of Uhud.

¹⁶Ibn al-Athir, *Usd al-Ghābah fi Ma'rifat al-Sahābah*, DarulWahbiyya, (Egypt 1970)v. 2, pp. 109

¹⁷Waqidi, *Magazi*, MatbayidarulMaraif, (Egypt, 1971)v. 2, p.744-745

¹⁸Ibn Abdilbar, *Al- İstiāb*, (Cairo .n.d) v. 3, p. 1034-1185, Ibn al-Athir, *Usd al-Ghābah*, v.2, pp.109

¹⁹Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, v. 4, p. 253.

²⁰Waqidi, *Magazi*, v.2, p. 748-749, Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, v.7, p. 394-395

²¹Waqidi, *Magazi*, v. 2, pp. 744, Abu'l-Fidā, *Al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah*, (Beirut, 1966)v.4, pp. 239-240

Such an example could not be imagined in a modern context. No world leader would greet the man who killed his people with a smile and a compliment, let alone giving him a house next to his own or even something as ridiculous seeming as giving the former enemy a commander position. It cannot be imagined that President George Bush would accept the plea for forgiveness from, let's say, Osama bin Laden, let alone treat bin Laden in such a way that all Americans would welcome him as a hero for the rest of their lives. While this is an extreme example, it is necessary to keep in the mind the scale of wicked acts and deaths that Khalid was responsible for at the time. No leader, let alone a Muslim leader of any stature, would commit such a deed. Such is the inimitable scale of positive thinking and action exemplified by Prophet Muhammad.

Abu Sufyan: Two Decades of Hatred

Abu Sufyan was a leader in the persecution carried out against the Muslims. For nearly 20 years, he and his family had a major role in the oppression and destruction of Muslims, from numerous assassination attempts of the Prophet, to all battles and skirmishes, to daily harassments. He was one of the three great enemies of Muslims, having had a part in every act of harassment, aggression, oppression and violence against them.²² His day would not be complete until he had personally harassed the Prophet and the Muslims.²³

He was one of the chieftains who decided to boycott the Muslims economically and socially for several years without wavering in his certainty and later worked to weaken the Muslims economically and cut off their supplies through the trade routes. As a brilliant tradesman, he sourced and allocated funds for the sole purpose of weakening and destroying the fledgling Muslim community. When the Muslims immigrated to Madinah, he went personally to kill two Muslims under the cover of night. He was a commander in the major battles against the Muslims, including the Battle of the Trench when he led an army of 10,000, more than three times the size of the Muslim army and the Battle of Uhud where 70 Muslims, including the Prophet's uncle Hamzah, were killed. His statesman-like capabilities were utilized in garnering support from Muhammad's enemies in Madina. His intelligence benefitted him when he launched psychological operations to raise support against and destroy the morale of the Muslims. He hired poets to express harsh views against the Muslims, especially Muhammad, which in modern times can be likened to using a mainstream news channel to smear someone's reputation. Abu Sufyan was unparalleled in his multifaceted onslaught of Muslims.

During his time in Makkah, Muhammad had prayed to God for help against the persecutors. After that, Makkah suffered a drought that led to famine and death. Abu Sufyan approached Muhammad and said, "You command people to obey God and maintain ties of kinship. Your people are dying, so pray to God for them."²⁴ After Muhammad prayed, it rained so heavily that after a few days people asked for the rain to cease. However, this did not change Abu Sufyan's approach to Muslims at all. On the contrary, he was intent on their destruction.

After the Quraish were defeated at the Battle of Badr, Abu Sufyan swore never to bathe, use perfume or approach his wife until he had his revenge on the Muslims.²⁵ This was the greatest and darkest oath an Arab man could make at that time. He plotted to unearth the body of the Prophet's mother to use her bones to extort against the Muslims.²⁶ He bought an African slave solely to kill the Prophet's uncle in return for freedom and gold.²⁷ He donated all of his profits from his trade in Syria to the campaign against the Muslims.²⁸ When a Quraishi man named Ibn Qamiah claimed that he had killed the Prophet at Battle of Uhud, Abu Sufyan was going to honor him with immediate reward and a great status afforded to legendary warriors.²⁹

On his way back to Makkah after that battle, Abu Sufyan heard that the Prophet had not, in fact, been killed, and was set on returning to the battlefield to complete his mission.

²² Waqidi, Magazi, v. 2, pp. 807, Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqat, v.4, pp. 50

²³ Waqidi, Magazi, v.2, pp.806

²⁴ Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, v. 1, p. 441, Bukhari, Sahih, v. 6, p. 19, Muslim, al-Jamius Sahih, Matbayi Amire, (Istanbul, 1956) v. 4, pp. 2156,

²⁵ Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, Sirah, v.3, pp. 47, Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqat, v.2, pp.30,

²⁶ Al-Azraqi, Ahbâru Makkah, (Makkah, 1965) v.2, pp. 272, Al-Halabi, Insanu'l-Uyûn, Istiqamet (Egypt, 1964) v. 2, pp. 490

²⁷ Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, Sirah, v.3, pp. 66, at-Tabari, Tarikhu'l-Tabari, Matbayi Husaniyya (Egypt 1957) v. 3. pp.10,

²⁸ Waqidi, Magazi, v.1, pp. 200, Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqat, v. 2, pp.37.

²⁹ Vâkidi, Magazi, v.1, pp. 236-237

However, a tribal leader convinced him otherwise.³⁰ He loved anyone who fought against the Prophet in any way.³¹ He refused to accept the Hudaibiyah Treaty which promised peace for the next decade.³²

The Prophet married Abu Sufyan's daughter when she became a widow during her stay in Abyssinia, where she and her husband had escaped the persecution of the Quraish. Marrying the daughter of the enemy was unimaginable in the Arabian Peninsula. Scholars hold that the purpose of this marriage, besides securing the wellbeing of a vulnerable woman, was to diminish the animosity Abu Sufyan and his tribe had against the Muslims.

The great enmity of Abu Sufyan better reflected the great magnanimity of Prophet Muhammad. When the Quraish broke the Hudaibiyah Treaty by killing Muslims and their allies, the Muslims had the right of offense based on tribal laws. Out of fear of the revenge the Muslims were allowed to enact, Abu Sufyan journeyed to Madinah to speak with the Prophet and Muslim leaders against taking such action. He entered Madinah and approached the Muslims without fear and faced no harm, which is hard to believe given he was one of the greatest enemies of Muslims and on the path of receiving deserved vengeance.³³ He struggled to convince the Muslims not to launch an attack against the Quraish in Makkah, but they turned Abu Sufyan away. If they desired, they could have killed him right there, which would have been accepted under tribal laws as Abu Sufyan was a sworn enemy who openly committed heinous acts and sought no repentance.

When the Prophet led an army of 10,000 to conquer Makkah after the breaking of the peace treaty, Abu Sufyan feared for his life knowing that he was first in line to be executed once the Muslims took over. Knowing that anyone executed by God's Messenger would have deserved it, Abu Sufyan went to seek forbearance. However, the Prophet turned his face away from the approaching Abu Sufyan after which the Companions forbid Abu Sufyan from coming further. Despite the distance, he called out saying, "I swear to God, either he is going to allow me to approach him or I will take my son with me far into the desert until we die of thirst and hunger. You (O Muhammad) are my relative, the best mannered, most compassionate, the most righteous and the most generous among people".³⁴ Upon hearing this, the Prophet accepted Abu Sufyan into his presence. The Prophet did not even mention any act of Abu Sufyan but rather said, "Woe to you, Abu Sufyan! I have come with a religion (from God) that would secure happiness in both worlds. Enter Islam and achieve peace!"³⁵ Upon hearing these, Abu Sufyan and his son accepted Islam.³⁶

This was not enough. Abu Sufyan asked for safety for his tribe, knowing their tough position among the Muslims. In tribal culture, once a tribe's leader guarantees safety to an individual, no one could harm that person. The Prophet guaranteed safety for whomever entered Abu Sufyan's home. Abu Sufyan wanted more as his whole tribe could not fit into his home. The Prophet then guaranteed safety to whoever entered the sacred precinct around the Ka'bah. Despite such magnanimous treatment, Abu Sufyan asked for more as he knew the other tribes could face retribution. The Prophet then gave this final guarantee of safety: whoever remained in their homes bearing no weapons would not be harmed.³⁷

This guarantee extended to Abu Sufyan's wife Hind.³⁸ She was the one who also took an oath like her husband, although hers was personal. She succeeded in fulfilling her oath, which was to avenge her loved ones killed by the Prophet's beloved uncle Hamza. She set the African slave Wahshi to kill the Prophet's uncle at the Battle of Uhud, but this was not enough. She sought out Hamza's body and had his body cut open, wherein she took out his liver and chewed it as she promised. She held the remains and made them into a necklace.³⁹

³⁰Ibn Ishaq, *İbn Hisham, Sirah*, v. 3, p. 108-109,

³¹M. AsımKöksal, *İslam Tarihi, KöksalYayıncılık*, (Istanbul, 1981)v. 5, pp.19-20

³²M. AsımKöksal, *İslam Tarihi*, v. 5, p.292-294.

³³M. AsımKöksal, *İslam Tarihi*, v. 6, pp.316-317

³⁴Ibn Ishaq, *İbn Hisham, Sirah*, v. 4, pp. 43

³⁵Al-Haythami, *Majmau'z-Zawâid*, (Beirut, 1967)v.6, pp.170

³⁶Ibn Ishaq, *İbn Hisham, Sirah*, v. 4, p.45-46

³⁷M. AsımKöksal, *İslam Tarihi*, v. 6, pp.360-368.

³⁸Waqidi, *Magazi*, v.2, pp. 850

³⁹Ibn Ishaq, *İbn Hisham, Sirah*, v 3, pp. 96-97

After the conquest of Makkah, like her husband, she too approached the Prophet and asked for forgiveness. This she was granted with a prayer despite the fact that she was the one who caused the death of the great Muslim warrior who protected the Prophet for many years.

Abu Sufyan watched the Muslim army proceed before him. The chief and flagbearer of the *Ansar*, the Muslims of Madinah, shouted out, "O Abu Sufyan! Today is the greatest day of war! On this day, shedding blood in the Ka'bah is permissible. God will disparage the Quraish!"⁴⁰ Abu Sufyan immediately went to the Prophet to complain of this threat. The Prophet replied, "Sa'd spoke wrongly. Today is the day God will honor the Ka'bah with the sound of the adhan (call to prayer). Today, the Ka'bah will be encompassed by the light of *Tawhid*."⁴¹

Despite the fact that Abu Sufyan was a new Muslim, the Prophet gave him the role of envoy and sent him to make peace with the BaniSakif tribe.⁴² After the Battle of Hunayn, Abu Sufyan pointed out the Prophet's increasing wealth from the spoils of the war. Upon hearing this, the Prophet smiled and gave him five kilograms of silver and 100 camels from the spoils. Subsequently, Abu Sufyan asked for war bounty for his two sons, and it was granted. All war spoils were distributed to the conquered Makkans. This really moved Abu Sufyan's feelings as he declared, "May my father and mother be sacrificed for your love."⁴³ How generous and righteous you are! When I fought against you, what a great warrior you were! When I made peace with you, what a great peacemaker you were! What you have done is the highest degree of generosity and righteousness!"⁴⁴

Tribal laws guaranteed the conqueror the right to everything: the lives of the men, the enslavement of the women and children, the usurping or destruction of animals, orchards, wealth and property. This is what the QuraishMakkans were expecting, especially given their hideous campaign against the Muslims for two decades. However, what they received was unimaginable and outside tribal practices.

Not only did the Prophet spare every life within the city of Makkah⁴⁵ from his first sermon onwards, but went on further. When the Muslims were exiled from Makkah, their properties were seized by the polytheist Makkans. The Prophet did not even ask for the return of these properties, an example followed by his Companions. They did not seek to regain their homes, their animals, their fields, their crops, their gold or anything else they had left behind. The Prophet forbade everyone until the Last Day from killing animals, scaring animals of prey,⁴⁶ cutting a tree, plant⁴⁷ and even a thorn of a plant, and taking lost property found on the streets for oneself. Makkah was a holy city to be protected down to the thorns of its plants.⁴⁸ With such a magnanimous statement, the hearts of the terrified polytheist Makkans were put at ease.

While the Prophet's positive actions towards Abu Sufyan and the Quraish in Makkah are hard to imagine, it is even harder to imagine how the Companions and those who were once great enemies took on these positive actions as their own. The greatness of a leader is measured by the greatness of his or her followers as well as his enemies. For the rest of their lives, those who once lived to destroy the Muslims came to live among the Muslims with no fear and did not even hear any mention of their past actions. The Prophet even forbade speaking ill of the dead, regardless of the evil actions they committed in the world.⁴⁹

While the Quraish could have planned to take back Makkah from the Muslims or seek revenge openly or secretly after feeling the psychology of defeat, they did not. The positive actions of the Prophet and the Muslims, who followed the Prophet's example astutely, surprised the conquered pagans. In place of the violence they expected, they received kind treatment. It was this treatment that scholars believe led most if not all Makkans to accept Islam in a few weeks. Moreover, they risked their lives not long after accepting Islam by taking part in a battle with the Muslims.

⁴⁰Bukhari,Sahih, v.5, pp. 91,

⁴¹Bukhari, Sahih, v. 5, pp.91 , Ebu'l-Fidâ, Al-Bidayah, v. 4, pp.291

⁴²Bukhari, Sahih, v.5, pp. 91 , Al-Bayhakî, Sunan,(Cairo, 1960)v. 9, pp.119

⁴³This is the greatest declaration of love a person in a tribal society could make.

⁴⁴Ibn Ishaq, İbn Hisham, Sirah, v.4, pp.126, Waqidi, Magazi, v.3, pp.929

⁴⁵İbn İsha k, İbn Hisham,Sirah, v, 4, pp. 55

⁴⁶Ibn Ishaq, İbn Hisham,Sirah, v. 4, pp. 58, Waqidi,Magaz,i v.2, pp. 844, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, v. 4,pp. 31

⁴⁷Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, v.1, pp.259, 316, Bukhari,Sahih, v. 1, pp.36

⁴⁸Ahmad Ibn Hanbal,Musnad, v. 1,pp.259-316, Bukhari,Sahih, v. 1, pp.36

⁴⁹Vaqidî, Magâzî, v. 2, pp. 851, Hâkim ,Müstadrak, (Riyad,1965)v. 3, pp. 241 .

The Prophet saw each person's potential, as though each was a lover of God biding his or her time. His role, after all, was to guide people towards the truth of God's sovereignty, justice and mercy. It is necessary to understand not only why the Prophet treated the enemies of Islam so kindly but how his Companions were able to accept the Prophet's example, take it as their own way of life and forgive the very people who killed their loved ones and chased them out of their homes. The Companions ended up living with these very people in the same city, yet they did not clash with these former enemies nor did they make mention of past evils.

The Case of Abu Mahzurah

After the conquest of Makkah, the Muslims marched towards Hunayn. Abu Mahzurah, who was not a Muslim, took part in that expedition with his friends. At the time, the Prophet was the person that Abu Mahzurah hated the most⁵⁰, but he took part in the expedition to gain spoils and benefits. On their return from Hunayn in Jiranah, he and his friends encountered the Prophet. After they heard the Prophet's *muaddhin* (caller to prayer) reciting the *adhan* (call to prayer). Abu Mahzurah and his friends mocked the *adhan* loud enough for the Prophet to hear⁵¹. The Prophet summoned these young people, including Abu Mahzurah, and asked that they recite the *adhan*. Each young person recited the holy call to prayer. The Prophet learned that Abu Mahzurah recited the best and said, "How beautiful is this voice that I heard. Rise and recite the call to prayer".⁵² The Prophet sent the other young men away without any punishment or even scolding and taught Abu Mahzurah how to make the call.⁵³ For Abu Mahzurah, fulfilling this request was very hateful for him, but he fulfilled the request for the sake of his personal benefit. After reciting the *adhan*, Abu Mahzurah was surprised by receiving a small pouch of silver coins and a pat on the head and back from the Prophet, a common gesture in tribal custom. The Prophet prayed for him and blessed him⁵⁴, upon which Abu Mahzurah asked to be made a *muaddhin* in Makkah. Despite the fact that Abu Mahzurah was not a Muslim, the Prophet allowed it. All these warmed Abu Mahzurah's heart and melted the hatred within and became Muslim. From thereonwards, the young man was full of love towards Prophet Muhammad and became an official *muaddhin*.⁵⁵ His descendants took honor in this and continued to be *muaddhins* for many generations.

Analysis

In times of strength and weakness, the Prophet avoided all acts and words that would further provoke those who hated him or were allied with those who hated him. While in Makkah, he and his Companions strove to keep a low profile. Historian Resit Haylamaz describes it as the Prophet and Companions trying to "remain invisible" to avoid conflict and tension. He sent a third of the Muslims to Abyssinia to fulfill this purpose. For the Muslims in Makkah, he set up a house wherein they could pray and learn about Islam in secret.⁵⁶ When exiting the house, he would ask that they did not leave all at once and kept a watchful eye for anyone noticing them. The Prophet met with a group of Madinah Muslim in a secretive manner.⁵⁷ When new Muslim Abu Dhar al-Ghaffari loudly and proudly proclaimed his new faith at the Ka'bah, he was fervently beaten by the polytheists. The Prophet asked that he return to his tribe outside of Makkah and return only after he heard that the Muslims had become strong.⁵⁸ The Prophet always sought out peaceful resolutions, even until the eve of battle, through diplomatic methods. Even on the battlefield, he sent offers of peace and truce but was rejected. Before the start of the Battle of Badr, he sent Umar as a peace envoy⁵⁹ who spoke to Hakim Ibn Hizam and then Hakim talked to Utbah, a strong enemy of the Prophet and a polytheist leader. Utbah saw it reasonable to turn away from fighting the Muslims who were all brothers, uncles or relatives to the Makkan polytheists⁶⁰. Although the offer was rejected by the other Makkan leaders, the Prophet praised Utbah for seeing the truth at such a dire time.⁶¹

⁵⁰ AbdurRazaq, *Musannaf*, (Beirut, 1970) v.1, pp. 457-458

⁵¹ Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, v.3, pp. 409

⁵² AbdurRazaq, *Musannaf*, v. 1, pp. 458

⁵³ Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, v.3, p. 409

⁵⁴ Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, v. 3, p. 409

⁵⁵ M. Asım Köksal, *İslam Tarihi*, v. 7, pp.117-119.

⁵⁶ Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, v.3, pp. 243

⁵⁷ Ibn Ishaq, İbn Hisham, *Sirah*, v. 2, pp. 83-84,

⁵⁸ Bukhari, v. 4, p.159, al- Hakim, *Mustadrak*, v. 3, pp. 339

⁵⁹ M. Asım Köksal, *İslam Tarihi*, v. 3, pp.317

⁶⁰ İbn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, v.2, pp. 15- 16

⁶¹ Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, v. 1, pp. 117, Rasit Haylamaz, *Fethin Muminleri*, Nil yayinlari, (Izmir, 2012) p. 172

Prior to the battle, a group of polytheist Makkans, including Hakim ibn Hizam, came close to the Muslims and drank water from a well nearby. The Muslims wanted to prevent this, but the Prophet told the Muslims to stand down and let the men drink the water.⁶²

When the battle began, the Prophet did not allow the Companions to be the first to attack.⁶³ Their strategic approach always emphasized defense. The Muslims were successful in the battle. They had prisoners of war, for which tribal custom permitted immediate execution if no hefty ransom was paid right away. The Prophet forbade this and saw that the prisoners were treated decently. They ate the same food as the Muslims. When food supplies were short, some Muslims went without food and gave their rations to the prisoners.⁶⁴ This treatment led to a third of those prisoners accepting Islam right away, while the others accepted over time. Outside of those who were killed at the Battle of Badr, all eventually entered the fold of Islam.

When the Muslims were prevented from making pilgrimage to Makkah by the polytheists, they were in very low spirits. Tribal laws allowed for all people to make their pilgrimages if conducted peacefully, but the Makkans had forbidden that.⁶⁵ The Prophet sent envoys four times to the Makkans to make a peace treaty, but each was rejected. In the meanwhile, the Makkans sent assassins three times to kill the Prophet; the Muslims captured each assassin and sent them back as per the Prophet's instructions. He had forgiven them⁶⁶, an unimaginable act in a situation that was highly unjust already.

When the Makkans finally agreed to draw up a peace treaty, they further insulted the Prophet by refusing to write his name down as God's Messenger in the treaty. This angered the Muslims greatly for their Prophet who dealt with so much injustice and forgave all in God's name would not be recognized for what he truly was. However, the Prophet calmed them down. When the scribe, Ali, refused to cross out the "God's Messenger" part⁶⁷, the Prophet offered to do it himself.⁶⁸ After the treaty was drawn, the Prophet asked that 20 camels be slaughtered for the poor Makkans⁶⁹, again as a form of voluntary peace offering, but also to act upon the tenets of Islam which ask Muslims to take care of their poor, even if they are enemies.

The Prophet sacrificed his own life, wealth, family and dignity for the sake of this peace treaty. He took a great risk that even his Companions were strongly against. This is where his standing differs from the Companions. As a prophet, he knew what the others did not know. The revelations he received from God added to his knowledge and love of God gave him the strength and wisdom to take such dangerous steps and stand against his Companions opinions, despite his immense love for them and respect of consultation as a principle. Abu Bakr later stated after the conquest of the Ka'bah that the Companions finally understood that the meaning of the "greatest conquest"⁷⁰ mentioned in the Quran was the Hudaibiyyah Treaty. These verses were revealed after the peace treaty. What was first understood to refer to the conquest of Makkah was not understood to be the conquest at Hudaibiyyah.⁷¹ The treaty opened the door to the peace that the Muslims desired and needed. It opened countless opportunities for them to build bridges, establish alliances and rekindle damaged relationships. Through improved relations and peace, the fear that fed the hatred of Muslims slowly diminished. This is the key path of positive thought and action- to decrease people's fears, which then leads to an increase in trust and love. Before Makkah was conquered, people's hearts were conquered through the positive thoughts and actions of Prophet Muhammad, which included great sacrifices both on his part and on the part of the Companions.

The Prophet recognized the favorable qualities in the tribal culture, such as generosity, bravery, sacrificing nature, concern for tribe members, and utilized these qualities to produce a greater good instead of the tribal superiority it had previously been used for.

⁶²Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, *Sirah*, v. 2, pp. 273-274

⁶³Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, v. 3, pp. 52

⁶⁴Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, *Sirah*, v. 2, pp. 299-300

⁶⁵Waqidi, v.2, p. 599, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, v. 4, pp. 324

⁶⁶Waqidi, *Magazi*, v.2, pp. 602, Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, *Sirah*, v. 3, pp. 329

⁶⁷Muslim, *Sahih*, v. 3, pp. 1410

⁶⁸Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, v. 4, pp. 291

⁶⁹M. AsımKöksal, *İslam Tarihi*, v.5, p.326-328

⁷⁰For the verses see chapter 48

⁷¹Waqidi, *Magazi*, v. 2, pp. 610

By giving high standards and great goals to people, he was able to transform negative qualities in the culture, such as the desire to enact revenge, to triumph over other tribes and to boast greatly about one's acts. He could not have ignored these qualities in hopes that they would go away. He had to engage with them and employ the facilities that were the source of these qualities in order to develop a civilized society. This article mentions only a few key examples of positive thought and action in the life of Prophet Muhammad. They are countless examples to be found in historical sources of such acts by the Prophet and his Companions.

Conclusion

Positive thinking is considered as a form of worship by Prophet Muhammad.⁷² It is a core principle encompassing his actions. A characteristic of all of God's prophets is their ability is to take the negative buildup of oppressed souls and transform them through positive action. Regardless of their conditions, they worked to reduce hatred and animosity and increase the love and compassion between people. This was part of their mission. They achieved this not through radical reaction but through gradual action, which is the path of positive thought and action. Acting in line with the natural law of energy conservation, the prophets used the method of redirecting the negative energies as opposed to diminishing them. They set goals for believers to keep themselves in continuous movement towards positive ends, a method used in modern psychology to maintain a person's positive development and happiness.⁷³

This work analyzed three cases of Prophet Muhammad's interactions with the polytheists Khalid ibn Walid, Abu Sufyan and Abu Mahzurah. The first two were unrivalled in their animosity towards the Prophet and Muslims. The Prophet waited 17 years for the former and almost 20 years for the latter to reform and see the light of the truth. These are long stretches of time during which Khalid and Abu Sufyan withheld no form of harassment, whereas the Prophet used all opportunities to commit goodactions towardsthem and mention their good qualities. The Prophet did not take their aggressions personally, focusing instead on his mission of building bridges between people. Although the third case of Abu Mahzurah may not rival the first two, the Prophet's reaction was still unimaginable. He not only withheld immediate reaction to scold Abu Mahzurah, but offered the young man who was insulting a symbol of Islam some wealth and the noble position of official *muaddhin* (the one who makes the call to prayer).

Whether he was the oppressed visionary preaching in secret or the head of a state, Prophet Muhammad did not veer from the encompassing principles of positive thinking. He sought to mend hearts as both a new messenger of God and as a civil leader. His positive thoughts extended not only to his friends or those who were Muslim, but also towards his greatest enemies of whom he never spoke ill.

It is unfortunate that for many centuries, new scholarship on the *Sirah* has not been published. It is highly necessary for modern times when Muslims look back to the Prophet's example to solve their current dilemmas. Misinterpretations and misunderstandings have led to weaknesses in practice of the faith, including the areas where positive action is needed. This has also lead to the rise of material which is used by sloganistic Islamists, Muslims who shout holy words but do not comprehend their meaning or how they are to be applied and practiced in current times.

There is much to gain from a thorough research of the *Sirah*. It is necessary to re-examine the *Sirah* in light of modern sciences and theology. A team of experts and scholars, including theologians, historians, psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists and jurists, can unite to examine and interpret the *Sirah* and produce a work that will fulfill the current needs of Muslims.

⁷²Narrated by Abu Dawud in F. Gulen, *Nağme: Kendine Rağmen Yaşamak*, <http://herkul.org/index.php/herkul-nagme/10634-291-nagme-kendine-ragmen-yasamak>

⁷³Robert Biswas-Diener and Ben Dean, *Positive Psychology: Coaching*, John Willey and Sons inc(New York, 2007)pp 62

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