



The World Could have been a Better Place

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It is not easy as a mortal being to be open to criticism of the people whom you hold so dearly, people whom you respect for the strength of their character, people whom you follow as your idol.

In Bangladesh, indeed perhaps all over the sub-continent, 'charlie' is someone who is somewhat of a buffoon, laughed at, never taken seriously. But, it is difficult, indeed painful, not to take Charlie Hebdo of Paris seriously when the magazine makes fun of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), the beloved, the respected, the idol of millions of Muslims all over the world.

Imagine your father being called a b_____d as an expression of freedom of speech by a Charlie newspaper. Imagine your mother being shown in a cartoon in the state of giving birth to swine by a Hebdo magazine because it considers it its right to degrade, abuse and humiliate fellow (excuse me!) human beings; and that bizarre 'right' is protected by the law of that country. The "freedom-loving people of some parts of the world have established a class of democracy that permits insulting our beloved Prophet Mohammad (pbuh)", and that is outright condemnable.

But seriously, we are not supposed to take the likes of Charlie Hebdo seriously, not even react in any way other than in prayer for the deranged mentality of its editors, cartoonists, and patrons.

The Qur'an tells us to be tolerant, (the Kouachi brothers were not), and pay no attention to foolish people (the brothers did). "Be tolerant, command what's right, and pay no attention to foolish people". (Qur'an 7:199)

The Qur'an teaches us to use knowledge and intelligence to call people to the way of Allah, not by

force. The Qur'an encourages us to debate with those who belittle us, not eliminate them. "Call people to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching, and argue with them in the most courteous way" (Qur'an 16:125)

It is because the cartoonists of the likes of Charlie Hebdo (France) and Jyllanda-Posten (Denmark) cannot justify their anti-all-religion stand that they take recourse to ridiculing others without provocation, and try to defend that utterly discourteous deportment as one's right.

Writes Jannat Nadya: "When Muslims are marginalised, mocked, attacked and treated as second-class citizens and then have their Prophet who they love more than themselves, parents and children insulted in the most vile way under the guise of 'freedom of speech', then it is not unexpected that mockery of this nature that violates the sanctity of one's honour will elicit a response."

The response was wrongly placed. Brothers Cherif and Said Kouachi were wrong to take the law into their own hands and go on a 'murderous rampage', as was Amedy Coulibaly, the gunman who killed five persons at a Jewish Kosher shop when the brothers were on the run. In that drama too there was a Muslim who saved seven Jews. But if the three attackers, killed by security forces, needed any provocation to lose their mind, the Paris magazine was amply resourceful. Islam was not their advocate.

Observed Dr Tariq Ramadan, "it is not the Prophet who was avenged (by the horrific killings at Charlie Hebdo), it is our religion, our values and Islamic principles that have been betrayed and tainted".

Dr Khalid Hanafy points out that "Insults were directed to the Prophet during his life and after his death; the Qur'an related such defamations and they will never stop", and then he explains that Muslims should respond appropriately "through thought, art and opinion not murder or terror".

"Our Prophet was verbally abused and physically harassed multiple times in Makkah. Never ONCE did any of the Companions go and murder those who did such deeds," writes Dr Yasir Qadhi. Even for those who believe that the penalty for blasphemy should be death, Qadhi explains the magnificence of the Islamic system: "by unanimous consensus of all the scholars of Islam, this (punishment) must take place after a legitimate trial, by a qualified judge, appointed by a legitimate Islamic state. Under NO circumstances does Islam allow vigilante justice; for to open this door leads to chaos, confusion and bloodshed".

Based on the Qur'an, Charlie Hebdo attacks are against the teachings of Islam, its general spirit, and its sublime objectives, says Dr Wael Shihab.

"Whosoever kills a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. (Qur'an 5: 32)

Can anything be more insulting to the Prophet than the satirical cartoons? Yes, says Sheikh Omar Suleiman, "those who murder innocent people in his name" because Muhammad was sent "as a mercy to all the worlds" (Qur'an 21:107)

Our only consolation, if that be possible, is that Charlie Hebdo is equally insulting and rude to other major religions, which means that they are insensitive to all beliefs. It doesn't give a damn to any form of establishment, and thrives on its reputation as patrons of atheism. The perennially controversial magazine prides in the French tradition of sarcasm. Does that mean it can hurt anyone every time? Only in its 20 December issue, Charlie Hebdo had a cartoon of "the

that which he holds dear, he doesn't stand back and listen to reason why he shouldn't set your house on fire. When he burns your house to the ground you only have yourself to blame. There is no human being, dead or alive, that is more beloved to Muslims than Muhammad bin Abdullah (pbuh). So how do you make caricatures of this man and not expect this type of reaction?"

The Jews reacted after the holocaust. Nazi cartoonist Julius Streicher drew cartoons slandering the Jews. Julius Streicher was hung after the war for crimes against humanity, and justifiably so because his cartoons created two sides - the ruthless Nazis and the helpless Jews.



People hold letters to form the word "solidarity" in Paris in tribute to the victims of a three-day killing.

PHOTO: AFP

Virgin Mary giving birth to a pig-faced Jesus" (pbuh). It had to (?) reprint the images of the Prophet Muhammad 2006 that had appeared controversially in Jyllanda-Posten a year before. So did anyone protest? "The Grand Mosque of Paris and the Union of Islamic Organizations of France, among other similar religious bodies, filed slander charges at the time, but a French court cleared the paper." Charlie continued with renewed vigour to add salt to the wound.

One Busari Mohammed Jamiu is angry at the system but he makes some telling points, "The direct consequence of Christian colonial activities in Muslim land, the anti-Islam system put in place, the imperialist invasion of Muslim countries, oppression of Muslims and the attempt of suppression of Islam is that today, the world is filled with badly-educated angry Muslim youths that knows nothing about Islamic ethics, compassion and mercy. These rascals don't even listen to Muslim scholars, and their overzealousness makes them go overboard half the time. When you deal with such people you trade carefully because when you take from a madman

Charlie Hebdo reacted too. In 2009, one of their journalists made an anti-Jew comment. He was sacked, as the paper itself never preached itself as a champion of free speech. It only takes liberty of the system that purports so.

It may be befitting to conclude with the comments of the brother of the slain French policeman, who was first to reach the Charlie Hebdo massacre site. He was a Muslim. Surprised? Why so? There obviously are many good French Muslims who pride in the values of the Republic - liberty, equality, fraternity, as do other Muslims who cherish the values of their non-Muslim country. Ahmed Merabet was wounded by one of the two Kouachi brothers, pleaded for mercy, and was then shot in the head in cold blood. His brother, Malek Merabet, said, "My brother was Muslim and he was killed by two terrorists, by two false Muslims... Islam is a religion of peace and love...France faced a battle against extremism, not against its Muslim citizens... One must not confuse extremists with Muslims. Mad people have neither colour, nor religion".