84308 - The Prophet’s interactions with the Jews

the question

How did the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) interact with the Jews?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The best of speech is the word of Allah, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), for he is the most perfect of Allah’s creation and he is the leader of the Messengers. He instructed us to adhere to his guidance, as he said: “You must adhere to my Sunnah.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (4607); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

His teachings and his Sunnah show us the best example and guide us to the best of manners, especially in his interactions (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) with the followers of other religions. We may sum up his conduct in his interactions with the Jews as follows:

1.

Adopting the correct attitude towards Judaism and all other religions. This attitude includes the belief that Islam and pure monotheism (Tawheed) are superior and all other religions constitute disbelief and are wrong; and the affirmation that on the Day of Resurrection, Allah, may He be exalted, will not accept anything but Islam and affirmation of the Oneness of Allah, as He, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:85].

This affirmation is the foundation on which the call of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was based, and his attitude was in accordance with it, because it is one of the

fundamentals of the Muslim's belief that has been subjected to deviation and distortion in recent times by those who promote the concept of "unity of religions".

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2.

Therefore the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was keen to call the Jews to Islam, and he did not miss any opportunity to convey to them the religion of Allah, may He be exalted, to the point that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not begin any fight with them – the cause of which was their treachery and betrayal – until he first called them and exhorted them, as he said to 'Ali ibn Abi Taalib (may Allah be pleased with him) on the day of the conquest of Khaybar: "Advance cautiously, until you reach their open space, then invite them to Islam, and tell them of their duties before Allah. By Allah, if Allah were to guide one man through you, that would be better for you than having red camels."

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2942) and Muslim (2406).

3.

Affirmation that the bonds of alliance and friendship should only be among the believers, and that it is obligatory to disavow any obvious disbelief. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) made Islam the basis of brotherhood, so it is not permissible for a Muslim to take as allies and close friends the followers of any religion, in terms of loving and affection. Therefore you find that when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) first came to Madinah, he hastened to establish the clear distinction between Islam and Judaism, and in the text of the constitution that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) issued instructions to be written in order to govern the relationship between the inhabitants of Madinah, it says: "The believers are one community to the exclusion of all others." Narrated by al-Qaasim ibn Salaam in al-Amwaal (517) from the mursal reports of az-Zuhri.

Dr Akram al-'Umari said:

These bonds are restricted to the Muslims and do not include others, such as the Jews or other allies. Undoubtedly the clear differentiation between religious groups was something deliberate that was aimed at making the group more cohesive and proud of its identity. End quote.

See: as-Seerah an-Nabawiyyah as-Saheehah by Dr Akram al-'Umari (1/272-291) in which he analyses the document in more detail.

4.

But the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) acknowledged the rights of the Jews and Christians. Those who think that disavowal of the distorted religion of the Jews necessitates mistreating them and taking away their rights are mistaken. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) accepted the presence of the Jews in Madinah and wrote in the constitution of Madinah: "The Jews of Banu 'Awf are one community with the believers," and he guaranteed to them all kinds of rights:

(a)the right to life: so he did not execute any Jew except one who committed an act of treachery and betrayal.

(b)the right to choose one's religion: as he allowed them to carry on following their religion, and he did not force anyone to become Muslim, acting in accordance with the words of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted (interpretation of the meaning): "There is no compulsion in religion" [al-Baqarah 2:256]. He wrote in the constitution of Madinah: "The Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs, their freedmen and their persons…"

(c)The right to own property. He did not confiscate the property of any one of them; rather the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) approved of the Muslims doing business with them.

(d)The right to protection and defence. It says in the constitution of Madinah: "The Jews must bear their expenses and the Muslims their expenses. Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document."

(e)The right to fair treatment and standing up against wrongdoing committed against anyone. This is affirmed in the constitution of Madinah in which it says: “To the Jew who follows us belong help and support. He will not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided.” The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was fair in passing judgement, even if it was at the expense of the Muslims. When the people of Khaybar killed ‘Abdullah ibn Sahl (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not rule that they had to pay the diyah (blood money), and he did not punish them for their crime, because there was no clear evidence against them. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) even paid his blood money from the wealth of the Muslims. The story is in al-Bukhaari (6769) and Muslim (1669). When al-Ash‘ath ibn Qays and a Jewish man referred a dispute to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) concerning some land in Yemen, and ‘Abdullah did not have any proof, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) ruled that the land belonged to the Jew, on the basis of his oath, as it says in al-Bukhaari (2525) and Muslim (138).

(f)The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) even given the Jews the right to refer for judgement concerning matters amongst themselves to their own religious laws, and he did not oblige them to follow Muslim laws so long as both parties in the matter were Jewish, unless they referred the dispute to him (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and asked him to judge between them. In that case he would judge between them according to the laws of Allah and the religion of the Muslims. Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “So if they come to you (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)), either judge between them, or turn away from them. If you turn away from them, they cannot hurt you in the least. And if you judge, judge with justice between them. Verily, Allah loves those who act justly” [al-Maa’idah 5:42).

5.

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) treated all people well, including the Jews. Allah, may He be glorified, enjoined fairness, kindness, good treatment and rendering back trusts with the Jews and others, as He, may He be glorified, said (interpretation of the meaning):

“Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity”

[al-Mumtahanah 60:8].

Examples of the kindness of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in his interactions with the Jews include the following:

(a)He used to visit their sick. Al-Bukhaari (1356) narrated from Anas ibn Maalik (may Allah be pleased with him) that a Jewish boy used to serve the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he fell sick. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came to visit him. He sat by his head and said: “Become Muslim.” The boy looked at his father, who was also by his head, and his father said to him: Obey Abu’l-Qaasim (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). So he became Muslim, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) left, saying, “Praise be to Allah Who have saved him from the Fire.”.

(b)He (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to accept their gifts. Al-Bukhaari (2617) and Muslim (2190) narrated from Anas ibn Maalik (may Allah be pleased with him) that a Jewish woman brought some poisoned mutton to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he ate some of it.

(c)The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to forgive their mistreatment, and he told the people not to kill that woman who had put the poison in the mutton. In the rest of the hadith mentioned above it says: She was brought to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he asked her about that. She said: I wanted to kill you. He said: “Allah will never give you the power to do that.” Or he said: “to me.” They said: Shall we kill her? He said: “No.” In fact, in the hadith of Abu Hurayrah in Saheeh al-Bukhaari (3169) it says that this was done with the knowledge of the Jews and that they admitted that they had tried to kill him with poison. Yet despite that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not issue orders that revenge be taken on his behalf, but after that he executed her for the death of the Sahaabi who had been

with him (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and had eaten some of the poisoned mutton; his name was Bishr ibn al-Bara' (may Allah be pleased with him).

Similarly, when the Jew Labeed ibn al-Asamm bewitched him, and Allah healed him from that spell, he did not take revenge on him or issue orders that he be killed. Rather in Sunan al-Nasaa'i (4080), in a report which was classed saheeh by al-Albaani, it is narrated that Zayd ibn Arqam said: He never mentioned that to that Jew and I never saw that reflected in his expression (if he met him).

(d)The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to enter into dealings with the Jews and would be sincere in his dealings with them. It was narrated that Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) gave Khaybar to the Jews on the basis that they would work and cultivate it, and they would have half of whatever it yielded. Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2165) and Muslim (1551).

It was narrated that 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) bought some food on credit from a Jew, and he gave him a shield of his as collateral (rahn). Narrated by al-Bukhaari (1990) and Muslim (1603).

(e)When the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) first came to Madinah, he used to like to go along with some of the deeds and customs of the Jews, so as to soften their hearts towards Islam. But when he saw their stubbornness, denial and arrogance, he issued instructions to be different from them, and he forbade resembling them.

It was narrated from Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to let his hair hang over his forehead and the mushrikeen used to part their hair. The People of the Book used to let their hair hang over their foreheads and the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) liked to do the same as the People of the Book in matters concerning which he had received no command. Then (later on) the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) parted his hair. Narrated by al-Bukhaari (3728) and Muslim (2336).

(f)The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not refrain from debating with them; rather he was humble with them and he would answer their questions, even if their intention in asking him was to be stubborn and argue on the basis of falsehood.

It was narrated that ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ood (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Whilst I was walking with the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in a field, and he was leaning on a stick, he passed by a group of Jews. They said to one another: Ask him about the soul. They said: Why do you want to ask him about it? He may give an answer that you dislike. They said: Ask him. So one of them stood up and asked him about the soul. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) remained silent and did not give any answer, and I knew that Revelation was coming to him. I stayed where I was, and when the Revelation ended he said: “And they ask you (O Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) concerning the Rooh (the spirit). Say: “The Rooh (the spirit) is one of the things, the knowledge of which is only with my Lord. And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little” [al-Isra’ 17:85].. Narrated by al-Bukhaari (444) and Muslim (2794).

(g)He used to pray for them to be guided and set straight. It was narrated that Abu Moosa (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Jews used to pretend to sneeze in the presence of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) hoping that he would say to them, May Allah have mercy on you, so he would say: May Allah guide you and set you straight. Narrated by at-Tirmidhi (2739); he said: It is hasan saheeh. It was classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh at-Tirmidhi.

6.

On the other hand, he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) not did not allow the Jews to transgress the sacred limits of the Muslims or to persist in that. He would punish anyone who transgressed against the Muslims, wronged them or overstepped the mark in doing so. When some of the Jews of Banu Qaynuqaa‘ harassed a Muslim woman in the marketplace and did a trick to expose her ‘awrah, and they challenged the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to fight, saying: O Muhammad, do not be deceived by the fact that you killed some of Quraysh, for they were unskilled and did not know how to fight; but if you fight us you will find out that we are

real men – as was narrated and classed as hasan by Ibn Hajar in Fath al-Baari (7/332) – the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) confronted them and expelled them from Madinah. That happened in Shawwaal of 2 AH.

When the trouble caused by the Jew Ka'b ibn Ashraf to the Muslims became grave and he began to impugn their honour and say things about their women in his poetry, and he travelled to Makkah to incite the leaders of Quraysh against the Muslims, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) issued orders to kill him. This is mentioned in a lengthy story of events that occurred in Rabee' al-Awwal 3 AH, which was narrated by al-Bukhaari (2375) and Muslim (1801).

Similarly, after repeated attempts by Banu an-Nadeer to kill the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), as is seen in well-known stories that were narrated by the authors of al-Maghaazi and Seerah, and they sent word to Quraysh to incite them to attack Madinah, and they told them of the Muslims' weak points, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) issued orders that they be banished from Madinah in 4 AH. See al-Maghaazi by al-Waaqidi (1/363-370) and Seerah Ibn Hishaam (3/682)

As for the Jews of Banu Qurayzah, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) executed their fighters when they betrayed him on the Day of al-Ahzaab and formed an alliance with Quraysh and the Arabs against the Muslims, and they broke the treaty that they had with the latter. That occurred in 5 AH.

See: Seerah Ibn Hishaam (3/706).

There are many reports which say that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) pardoned everyone among the Jews who showed commitment to the treaty and he only punished those who took part in the treacherous acts or approved of them.

See: as-Seerah an-Nabawiyyah as-Saheehah by Akram al-'Umari (1/316). It said in the covenant of Madinah: "The Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs, their freedmen and their persons, except those who behave unjustly and sinfully, for they hurt but themselves and their families."

Finally, when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) saw the betrayal and treachery of the Jews, Allah revealed to him that the Arabian peninsula should be exclusively for the religion of pure monotheism, and no religion should be left in it except the religion that Allah had chosen.

It was narrated from Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) issued instructions during his final illness, saying: “expel the mushrikeen from the Arabian Peninsula.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2888) and Muslim (1637)

And Allah knows best.