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Exploring the Ethical Dimensions and Principles of *Raḥmatan Lil-‘Ālamīn* in Contemporary Context

Hakimah Ahmad Sabri*

Fatmir Shehu**

Abstract

This article seeks to explore the ethical dimension of the concept of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn* (mercy for all creatures). It aims at the analysis of this concept through the history of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)’s life. The significance of this study lays on the application of this concept in contemporary context. This research starts with a brief introduction followed by a discussion on the meaning of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn*, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) the epitome of mercy and the exemplary ethical role model, the ethical dimensions *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn*, its ethical principles, and its application in Contemporary Context. A qualitative methodology is employed by analyzing *al-Taḥsīn* (exegesis) of the related *Qur’ānic* verses and *Aḥādīth* (sayings of the Prophet p.b.u.h.) pertaining to this concept. The findings show that based on the history of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)’s life, several ethical dimensions, i.e., the belief in Allah S.W.T., the freedom of choice, and responsibility) and ethical principles, i.e., Revelation-based mercy, forgiveness, respect, tolerance, and strictness, are found in the concept of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn*. Besides, golden values, such as tolerance, love, harmony, and unity particularly in social dimension are intensely promoted through this concept, and hopefully it will increase social cohesion and unity and encourage people to be the best model of themselves.

Keywords: *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn*, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), ethics, principles, tolerance.

Introduction

Allah S.W.T. has described Himself in *al-Qur’ān* as *al-Raḥīm* (the Most Merciful). The Mercy of Allah S.W.T. is boundless and it encompasses all of His creations without exceptions. It is manifested through all kinds of blessings that people can name it, be it tangible, such as wealth and good health or intangible, such as tranquility of the heart, happiness, and many others. It can also be in the misfortunes, which are disguised as blessings because through difficulties, people reflect, turn to Allah S.W.T. and seek

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repentance. Aside from Divine Mercy, human beings can also show mercy towards each other. The Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) has been proclaimed by Allah S.W.T. in *al-Qur’ān* as *Raḥmatan Lil-‘Ālamīn* (mercy for all creatures) with his exalted standard of character. This indicates that Islam teaches Muslims to show mercy through ethical behaviors towards all kinds of creation.

Unfortunately, this virtue has become uncommon in today’s times. Many people including Muslims nowadays devote themselves only to pursue material possessions. They put their highest objective in life to obtain material well-being to the extent that they have forgotten to show mercy towards themselves and other fellow human beings. The mercy which is manifested through one’s ethics is rarely manifested in personal and public life. That explains the decline of moral values happening in most of societies nowadays. Many of its members do not show respect towards each other and this is worrying because it might lead to hatred and religious intolerance. In addition, there are so many ongoing religious, cultural, political, economic and national based conflicts in today’s world which seem to never end.

In spite of this fragile situation, everyone member of world’s global village loves to coexist peacefully. Therefore, both researchers believe that the study on ethical dimensions and principles of the concept of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn* is greatly significant and relevant subject especially when it is applied in the contemporary social context on the interaction between Muslims and others. In Malaysia, this concept is recently introduced to govern the multi-religious and multi-cultural society in the light of *al-Qur’ān* and as-*Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). It is hoped that the exploration of the ethical dimensions and principles of *Raḥmatan Lil-‘Ālamīn* will encourage people to show mercy to each other and improve social cohesion and harmony of the society. To explore the ethical dimensions and principles promoted by this concept, it is greatly important to start the discussion with the meaning of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn*, which is considered as the key concept of this research.

The Meaning of *Raḥmatan Lil-‘Ālamīn*

The concept of *Raḥmatan Lil-‘Ālamīn* is primarily derived from *al-Qur’ān*, where Allah S.W.T. says: “We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures” (al-Anbiyā’, 21:107).¹ The content of this *Qur’ānic* verse is

¹ The reference for all translated Qur’anic verses mentioned in the entire paper is: A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (Maryland: Amana

profoundly explained by Muslim scholars to provide an appropriate interpretation of this concept in order to encourage people to follow the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) in showing mercy to others. This concept is formed from the combination of two expressive terms, which are in a close relationship with each other denoting a comprehensive meaning.

The first term is *ar-Raḥmah* (the mercy), which originally derives from the root word – *Ra-Ḥi-Ma* – denoting mercy, kindness, compassion and forgiveness.¹ *Al-Qur’ān* has specially mentioned that mercy is among the Attributes of Allah S.W.T. He is *al-Raḥmān* (The Most Compassionate, the Beneficent) and *al-Raḥīm* (The Most Merciful). This Divine Attribute is then shared between the creations so that they can manifest mercy, kindness and compassion in among themselves. This is explained in the *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurairah (r.a.) where the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said: “Allah S.W.T. has one hundred (degrees of) Mercy, of which He has shared one between all of creation, by virtue of which you show mercy and compassion towards one another and the wild animals show compassion towards their young. And He has kept back ninety-nine (degrees of) mercy by virtue of which He will show mercy to His slaves on the Day of Resurrection.”² This *Ḥadīth* exhibits the vastness of Allah S.W.T.’s Mercy that the mercy shown by all creatures in this world takes up only one part of His Mercy.

Ar-Raḥmah is mentioned 116 times in 144 *Suwar* (chapters) in *al-Qur’ān*³ and its meaning varies according to the context of its use in the Qur’anic verses. Ibn al-Qayyīm al-Jawzī mentions in *Nuzḥah al-‘Ayun al-Nawāzīr* that the Qur’anic commentators have pointed out sixteen interpretations of *ar-Raḥmah* in relation to the context of various Qur’anic verses. They are: (1) *al-Jannah* (paradise), (2) *al-Islām* (submission), (3) *al-Īmān* (conviction), (4) *an-Nubuwwah* (Prophecy), (5) *al-Qur’ān* (Qur’an), (6) *al-Maṭar* (rain), (7) *ar-Rizq* (provision), (8) *an-Ni‘mah* (bounties), (9) *al-‘Āfiyah* (wellness), (10) *al-Naṣr* (victory), (11) *al-Minnah* (gift), (12) *ar-Riqqah* (gentleness), (13) *al-Maghfirah* (forgiveness), (14) *al-Si‘ah* (vastness), (15) *al-Mawaddah* (affection),

Corporation, 1989).

¹ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥayā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1988), p. 173.

² Ibn Mājah, Abu ‘Abdillāh Muhammad bin Yazīd, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Referenced by Hafiz Abu Tahir Zubair ‘Alī Za’I, Translated by Nasiruddin al-Khaṭāb, Edited by Huda Khattab, Reviewed by Abu Khaliyl (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), vol. 5, p. 391, *Ḥadīth* 4293.

³ According to the search result in Zekr Software, the open source Qur’anic application used as a tool for browsing and researching on the Qur’ān. It was developed by Mohsen Saboorian et al. Accessed February 16, 2020, <https://zekr.org/faq.html>

and (16) *al-‘Iṣmah* (protection).¹ These interpretations show the extensiveness of the meaning of *Raḥmah*, which refers to all kinds of blessings granted by Allah S.W.T. for the well-being of His creations.

The second term is *lil-‘ālamīn* (for all creatures), which indicates the greatness of Allah S.W.T.’s Mercy including all of His creations. There are discussions among the Muslim scholars pertaining to the issue whether the non-believers obtain the mercy of Allah S.W.T. or not. Ibn Jarir at-Ṭabarī in *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān* raises this issue and mentions two responses pertaining to it. He says that the *first group* argues that Allah S.W.T.’s Mercy encompasses both believers and non-believers. This is based on the narration recorded by Ibn ‘Abbās (r.a.) which says: “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, mercy will be decreed for him in this world and the Hereafter; whoever does not believe in Allah and His Messenger, will be protected from that which happened to the nations of earthquakes and stoning.”²

Meanwhile, the *other group* asserts that the word *‘ālamīn* in the verse refers only to those who believe and have faith in Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). At-Ṭabarī agrees with the narration by Ibn ‘Abbās and comes to the conclusion that Allah S.W.T.’s Mercy encompasses all including the non-believers.³ Allah S.W.T. grants mercy to the believers by providing His guidance, the true way of life (*al-Islām*) and ultimately the paradise, and to the non-believers by delaying the afflictions, which destroyed the previous nations that refused to believe in the messengers sent to them. At-Ṭabarī also mentions the same thing in his *Mukhtaṣar Tafsīr at-Ṭabarī* that the believers (*al-Mu‘minūn*) are blessed with true conviction (*al-Īmān*) and non-believers (*al-Kāfirūn*) are blessed with the delay of affliction.⁴ In other words, the sending of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is the blessing for both believers and non-believers in any possible way.

¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nuzḥah al-A‘yūn al-Nawāzīr* (Beirut: Mu‘assasah al-Risālah, 1987), pp. 331-334.

² Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fadā’ Ismā‘īl bin ‘Amr bin Kathīr al-Qurshiyī al-Dimashqī. *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘Azīm*, al-Muḥaqqiq: Sāmī bin Muḥammad Salāmah, (Dār Ṭiybah Lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 2nd ed, 1420H/ 1999 C.E.), Vol. 5, p. 387.

³ At-Ṭabarī, Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur‘ān* (Cairo: Markaz al-Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-‘Arabiyah wa al-Islāmiyah, 2001), pp. 439-441.

⁴ At-Ṭabarī, Ibn Jarīr, *Mukhtaṣar Tafsīr at-Ṭabarī*, edited by ‘Ali al-Ṣabūnī and Ṣāliḥ Ahmad Riḍā (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā’ at-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1993), p. 62.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) the Epitome of *ar-Rahmah* and the Exemplary Ethical Role Model

Allah S.W.T. says: “*We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures (al-Anbiyā’ 21:107).*” According to Sayyid Qutb’s *Tafsīr fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, the sending of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) to mankind is the manifestation of Allah S.W.T.’s Grace. He depicts that *al-Qur’ān* given to men through Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is a code of living that ensures happiness of all mankind across the generations and a message that manifests the Divine Grace for all humanity. It contains permanent fundamental principles of life, which guide human beings in their contextual settings that always change and develop across the times.¹ Prior to the descent of *al-Qur’ān* to humanity, the Arab community was very much divided into tribes. Some were superior to the others considered as nobles and respected while some others were servants and ignored.

The advent of Islam demolished all these distinctions and brought equality and unity to mankind irrespective of their tribes, races, wealth or social status under the umbrella of *Tawḥīd* (the Oneness of Allah). In fact, what differentiates people from one another is their level of *Taqwa* (righteousness) as Allah S.W.T. says: “*O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that Ye may know each other (not that Ye may despise each other). Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)*” (Al-Ḥujurāt, 49:13). This kind of principle depicted in *al-Qur’ān* reflects the way Islam promotes the ethical conduct in treating others including the non-believers without prejudice and discrimination through the concept of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn*.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is the ultimate role model for all human beings irrespective of their socio-cultural-religious backgrounds. That is why Allah S.W.T. clearly states in *al-Qur’ān* that Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is the mercy for all creatures by using the word ‘*lil ‘ālamīn*’ (for all creatures), not the word ‘*lil Muslimīn*’ (for the Muslims). The Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s being the mercy for all creatures and especially humanity, is reflected through his exalted standard of ethics. Indeed, he is the most ethical person that history has ever known. Allah S.W.T. describes the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s character in *al-Qur’ān*: “*And thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character* (Al-Qalam, 68:4).” This is

¹ Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, translated and edited by Adil Salahi, Vol. XII, (United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, 2006), pp. 81-83.

further strengthened when the mother of the faithful ‘Aisyah (*Umm al-Mu’minīn*) was asked to describe the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s character and she replied, “His *Khuluq* was *al-Qur’ān*.”¹ Thus, if people would like to realize the spirit of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn* in the contemporary era that is full of hatred and enmity, they should learn lessons from Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)’s life which is ever relevant throughout times and space. According to the history of Arab community prior to the coming of Islam, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) was already known as the most trustworthy one among them even prior to his Prophecy to the extent that he earned the title *al-Āmīn* (the trustworthy).² During the event of *Hijrah* (migration) from Mecca to Medina, the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) assigned ‘Ali (r.a.) to remain in Mecca for some days and return all the things that have been trusted to him by people and even his enemies.³ He is the most trustworthy person to the extent that his enemies trusted their valuables to him. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) gains respect from people through the excellence, maturity and honesty of his perfect personality.

In the history of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s life are found many instances showing the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s interactions with others that are overflowed with mercy. There was a time when the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) went to *Taif* to seek support from the *Thaqif* due to the increasing enmity and hostility of the *Quraysh*. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) talked to their chiefs, called them to Islam, and asked support from them. Sadly, the chiefs denounced the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) to the extent that they provoked their louts and slaves to mock and insult him until he had to take refuge and rest at the vineyard belonging to ‘Utbah ibn Rabi’ah and his brother, Shaybah. When the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) reached safely, instead of praying for the calamities towards those people who harmed him and treated him in a very bad manner, he made the following *Du‘ā*:

“O Allah! To you I complain of my weakness, of my helplessness, and my insignificance before men. O Most Merciful of the merciful, You are the Lord of the helpless and You are my Lord! Into whose hands would You entrust me? Into the hands of a remote person who would scowl at me, or to an enemy who You have given control over

¹ Muslim, Abū al-Ḥussayn, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, referenced by Hafiz Abu Tahir Zubair ‘Alī Za’ī, Translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab, edited by Huda Khattab, reviewed by Abu Khaliyl (Riyad: Darussalam, 2007), vol. 2, p. 258, *Ḥadīth* 746.

² Muhammad Husain Haekal, *Sejarah Hidup Muhammad* (Jakarta: Pustaka Liter Antarnusa, 1995), p. 60.

³ Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā’īl, *al-Bidāyah wa an-Nihāyah*, Vol. 3 (Dar al-Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1988), pp. 218-219.

my affairs? If You are not angry with me, I do not mind: but Your clemency is wider for me. I seek refuge with the Light of Your Countenance, whereby all darkness is illuminated, and of which all affairs are ordered in this world as well as in the Hereafter, from (any possibility) that you should send down Your anger or that I should incur Your wrath. It is for me to return to you until You are well satisfied! There is no means nor might save with You!¹”

This story is very heart-wrenching and truly reminds especially the Muslims to not seek revenge on others but be kind in every possible way. Abū Hurairah (r.a.) once asked the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) to pray for the catastrophe of the non-believers (*al-Musyrikūn*). The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) replied: “I was not sent as an invoker of curses, rather I was sent as a mercy.”²

Another aspect of Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s manifestation of mercy is depicted in a *Ḥadīth*, which is narrated by Anas bin Mālīk (r.a.) where there was a young Jewish boy who used to serve the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and he fell sick. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) went to visit him and he sat near his head and asked him to embrace Islam. The boy looked at his father who was sitting there, and his father told him to obey the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). The boy embraced Islam and the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) came out saying: “All the praises and thanks belong to Allah S.W.T., Who saved the boy from the Hell-fire.”³ The ethical value from this story is that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) with all of his dignity and humility showed his care and affection to visit the sick boy of another religion out of his pure concern and even invited the boy to Islam. This is how he conveyed the spirit of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn*.

The way Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) gives advice to people is also remarkable and full of mercy. It is narrated by Anas bin Mālīk (r.a.) that when the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) was in the mosque with his Companions, a *Bedouin* (a nomadic Arab of the desert) came and urinated in the mosque. The Companions tried to stop him but the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) calmly said: “Do not interrupt him, let him be.” So, the *Bedouin* was left alone until he finished his business. Then, the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) called him and said to him, “These *Masājīd* are not for any of this urine and filth; rather they are for the remembrance of Allah S.W.T., and *Ṣalāt* (prayers), and reading *al-*

¹ Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah Ibn Hishām*, Abridged by Abdus-Salam M. Harun. (Cairo: Al-Falah Foundation for Translation, Publication and Distribution, 2000), pp. 89-90.

² Muslim, Abū al-Ḥussayn, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 6, p. 460, *ḥadīth* 2599.

³ Al-Bukhārī, Muhammad Ibn Ismā’īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, translated by Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (Riyāḍ: Darussalam, 1997), vol. 2, p. 252, *Ḥadīth* 1356.

Qur’ān.” Then he asked a man from the people to bring a bucket of water and pour over the urine.¹ Instead of getting angry towards the *Bedouin* who had polluted the mosque in an unwanted manner, the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) remained composed and gave gentle reminder and clear information to him because probably he did not know about the etiquette of entering and sitting in the mosque. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) also did not rush to punish those who make mistakes. Rather, he preferred to tolerate and correct them first.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) was always provoked and insulted by the non-believers throughout his life. But never once he avenged people for their evil deeds. In a *Ḥadīth* narrated by Ibn Abī Mulaika is mentioned that ‘Āishah (r.a.) said: “The Jews came to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and said to him, “*As-Sāmu ‘alaika* (i.e., death be upon to you).” The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) replied, “The same on you.” ‘Āishah (r.a.) said to them, “Death be upon you, and may Allah curse you and shower His Wrath upon you!” The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said: “Be gentle and calm, O ‘Āishah! Be gentle and beware of being harsh and of saying evil things.” She said: “Did not you hear what they said?” He said: “Did not you hear what I replied (to them)? I have returned their statement to them, and my invocation against them will be accepted but theirs against me will not be accepted.”² This is a remarkable and extraordinary act shown by Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) even to people who insulted him and wished for his death. He was gentle but at the same time firm in dealing with this kind of people. He did not even allow his wife to return the invocation harshly.

Another manifestation of Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s extraordinary mercy is depicted after the conquest of Khaybar. In a *Ḥadīth* narrated by Anas bin Mālīk (r.a.), there was a Jewess, who brought a poisoned (cooked) sheep for the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) as a gift. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) realized that the meat has been poisoned only after eating a little from it and spit it out. The woman was brought to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and the Companions asked Prophet (p.b.u.h.): “Shall we kill her?” He said: “No.” Anas (r.a.) mentioned that he continued to see the effect of the poison on the palate of the mouth of Prophet (p.b.u.h.).³ The woman’s intention to kill the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is certainly obvious but the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) did not avenge the evil deed of the woman towards him. Indeed, the manifestation of Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s mercy towards others is extraordinary and countless. Despite all the crimes and violence inflicted by the non-

¹ Muslim, Abū al-Hussayn, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 408, *Ḥadīth* 285.

² Al-Bukhārī, Muhammad Ibn Ismā‘īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. vol. 8, p. 226, *Ḥadīth* 6401.

³ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 453-454, *Ḥadīth* 2617.

believers towards the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) physically and mentally, he kept showing graciousness and kindness towards everyone around him, reflecting the true spirit of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn* for all human beings regardless of their religions. Getting back to people who hurt us does not give any benefit but rather it will just fuel enmity and hatred and give rooms for the devils to destroy us even more. Perhaps, by reviving the spirit of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn*, it could invite more people to know and learn about true and authentic understanding of Islam.

Despite the overflowing kindness, forgiveness and gentleness shown by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) throughout his life, his mercy does not limit to those acts. He shows obvious strictness and firmness in matters related to *‘aqīdah* (creed) and *Sharī’ah* (law). It is not appropriate to focus only on Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s gentleness and graciousness as an indicator to mercy. In fact, his strictness is also a part of his manifestation of mercy.

The Ethical Dimensions of *Raḥmatan Lil-‘Ālamīn*

The concept of *Raḥmatan Lil-‘Ālamīn* cannot be comprehended unless it is implemented in the actions of people’s day-to-day lives. Therefore, it has a very close relationship with the concept of ethics, where one’s mercy is shown through actions. The English word *ethics* originally comes from the Ancient Greek word *ethos*, which means disposition or character.¹ Ethics can be defined as a discipline of knowledge which studies human conducts or actions and interprets them as right or wrong and good or bad.² It governs the humans’ decisions in all aspects of life: personal, social, political, economic, business, and many others with the aim to produce the best out of them.

In Islam, ethics is known as *Akhlāq* (a plural form for *Khuluq*). *Al-Khuluq* in literal Arabic interpretation has various meanings. *Al-Mu‘jam al-Falsafī* defines it as *as-Sajiyyah* (inborn character), *al-Ṭaba‘* (natural disposition), *al-‘ādat* (habits and customs.), *al-Murū’ah* (bravery and loyalty) and *al-Dīn* (a way of life),³ where the first three are synonyms to each other as they carry the same meaning. *Al-Khalq* shares the same spelling with *al-Khuluq* but it brings another meaning which is the creation. However, Imām Al-Ghazzālī tends to relate between *al-Khalq* (the physical form) and *Khulq* (the spiritual form) where he points out

¹ Henry George Liddell et al., in *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 766.

² Mardzelah Makhzin, *Sains Pemikiran dan Etika*, (Kuala Lumpur: PTS Professional Publishing Sdn. Bhd., 2006) p. 24.

³ Jamil Saliba, *Al-Mu‘jam al-Falsafī*, (Beirut: Al-Syarikah al-‘Alamiyah li al-Kitāb, 1994), pp. 539-540.

that the former is the physical body of man while the latter is the natural self of man from which actions are demonstrated spontaneously and voluntarily.¹ Ibn Miskawayh in his *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* also describes *Akhlāq* as a state of self (*an-Nafs*) where actions are easily derived from it and they do not require thought and careful consideration which is similar to the definition as prescribed in *al-Mu’jam al-Falsafī*.² We could see how ethics in Islam is very much related with the concept of self that is the spiritual entity embodies in man.

In Islam, ethics are not separated from *al-Dīn* (religion), rather, they are built entirely upon it.³ It means that Islamic ethics are moral standards that come from Allah S.W.T. (transcendental in nature) and should govern a Muslim’s conduct in all aspects of his/her life. Islamic ethics is essentially retrieved from two primary sources: *Al-Qur’ān* and *as-Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). Numerous Qur’ānic verses and *Ḥadīth* have demonstrated a code of ethics, which addresses all dimensions of human affairs. That is to say, *Akhlāq* is actually associated with verses pertaining to *al-Īmān* and *Sharī’ah* because they are intended to realize the ultimate purpose of the creation of man, which is to be good *Khalīfah* of Allah S.W.T. by implementing good actions as manifested in the revelation.⁴ Moreover, if the Qur’ānic verses are examined in a comprehensive manner, many people would be inspired to do good by *firstly* fulfilling the rights of Allah S.W.T. and then the rights in relation to other human beings.⁵ Thus, ethical principles in Islam are extracted from the Divine Guidance that comes directly from the Revelation, which guarantees the prosperity of human beings if they adhere to them without leaving behind the significance of reason, i.e. *Ijtihād*.

Mardzelah Makhsin asserts that there are three dimensions in Islamic ethics: *al-Īmān* (true conviction) in Allah S.W.T., the freedom of choice, and responsibility.⁶ *Firstly*, the absolute and sincere submission towards Allah S.W.T. ensures people to accept and abide by the Islamic teachings whether on matters related to ‘*aqīdah* (creed), ‘*ibādah* (act of

¹ M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzālī* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2013), p. 195.

² Ibn Miskawayh, Ahmad bin Muhammad, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq wa Taṭhīr al-A’rāq*, (Beirut: Dār Maktabah al-Hayāt, 1977), p. 41.

³ Al-Fārūqī, Ismā’īl Rājī, *Al-Tawḥīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (USA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992), p. 64.

⁴ Amilah Awang, “Recapturing the Meaning of Akhlaq Islamiyyah.” *Al-Itqan: Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2017. pp. 1-24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶ Mardzelah Makhsin, *Sains Pemikiran dan Etika*, pp. 88-89.

devotion and submission) or *Akhlāq* (ethics). *Secondly*, Allah S.W.T. gives the power and freedom to people to choose whether to do good or evil. This is called as *Huriyyatul Ikhtiyār* (freedom of choice). The responsibility and accountability for people's own actions is the third ethical dimension. Allah S.W.T. says: "*It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns*" (al-Baqarah, 1:286).

In this context, being merciful towards other creations is one code of ethics commanded by Allah S.W.T. where He says: "*Then will he be of those who believe, and enjoin patience, (constancy, and self-restraint), and enjoin deeds of kindness and compassion*" (al-Balad, 90:17). Being merciful is fulfilling the rights in relation to other human beings (*Hablun min-Nās*) and it must come together with a good relationship with Allah S.W.T. (*Hablun min-Allah*) because either one alone does not ensure one a paradise. Establishing and maintaining good relationships with other fellow human beings is very important for Muslims to obtain Allah S.W.T.'s mercy aside from fulfilling the rights towards Him. For instance, how can a pious person who devotes himself to Allah S.W.T., speaks harshly and treats other people badly? The people who are not merciful towards others are warned in a *Ḥadīth* narrated by Jarīr bin 'Abdullah where Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) said: "Allah S.W.T. will not be merciful to those who are not merciful to mankind."¹

In another *Ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurairah (r.a.), the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said: "Whosoever believes in Allah S.W.T. and the Last Day, should not harm his neighbor; and whosoever believes in Allah S.W.T. and the Last Day, should entertain his guest generously and whosoever believes in Allah S.W.T. and the Last Day, should say what is good or keep quiet."² These *Aḥādīth* show how central mercy towards others is in achieving Allah S.W.T.'s Mercy and ensuring the well-being of society. Being merciful towards every fellow human being as well as other creations is a part of *Akhlāq* and the manifestation good *Akhlāq* is a part of *'ibādah*. Thus, both relationships *Hablun min-Allah* and *Hablun min-Nās* complement each other and they are both *'ibādah* as long as the intention is to please Allah S.W.T..

The Ethical Principles of *Raḥmatan Lil-'Ālamīn*

In this section, the focus of discussion will be the ethical principles of *Raḥmatan lil 'Ālamīn*, which the researchers have extracted from the

¹ Al-Bukhārī, Muhammad Ibn Ismā'īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Vol. 9, p. 287. *Ḥadīth* 7376.

² Ibid, Vol. 8, p. 92, *Ḥadīth* 6136.

history of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)’s life. These ethical principles are analyzed in order to show their relationship with the concept of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn* as follow:

1. Revelation-Based Mercy

Mercy in Islam is comprehensive and it covers both *Ḥablun min-Allah* and *Ḥablun min-Nās*. The remarkable mercy shown by Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is essentially based on the Divine Guidance. The ultimate purpose of his commitment to mercy is to be genuinely devoted to Allah S.W.T. through which he obtained His Mercy and Pleasure. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is the most devoted person towards Allah S.W.T. and he never did anything against the commands of Allah S.W.T. In fact, there were many times in his life that he waited for the Revelation and Guidance from Allah S.W.T. on how to respond to certain matters/events. Thus, the Muslims’ code of conduct must be based on the Revelation because only Allah S.W.T. knows what is good/right and bad/wrong to every human being.

These matters cannot be left totally to human beings to decide only with their rational thought because they will tend to act on what will give the most benefit to them although such action is wrong. For this reason, the Muslims have to act according to *al-Qur’ān* and *as-Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) including on being merciful to others. Practicing Revelation-Based Mercy will ensure the reservation of the rights of all parties and ultimately will make them to attain the pleasure of Allah S.W.T.

2. Forgiveness

Forgiveness and mercy are interrelated to each other. One cannot be truly merciful without forgiving others. It is illustrated in numerous events of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)’s life that he always forgave people who harmed him directly and indirectly. That is one way of how he showed mercy to other people. In a *Ḥadīth* narrated by ‘Aṭa bin Yasār (r.a.), the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is portrayed as a person, who will never do evil to people who do evil to him. Rather, he deals with them with forgiveness and kindness.¹ The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) does not only forgive others but also seeks forgiveness for them. He even made a *Du‘ā* “O Lord! Forgive my people as they do not know,” while wiping the blood off his face due to the violence of non-believers towards him.² Forgiveness is truly a noble act in Islam and practicing it will certainly be rewarded by

¹ Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 194-195, *ḥadīth* 2125.

² Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad Ibn Ismā‘īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 9, p. 49, *Ḥadīth* 6929.

Allah S.W.T. Allah S.W.T. says: “*Hold to forgiveness; command what is right; but turn away from the ignorant*” (al-A’rāf, 7:199). Allah S.W.T. wants people to forgive each another because no man is free from making faults and mistakes. In addition, practicing forgiveness helps one to break free from the feelings of resentment, vengeance, grievance, and any other displeasure. It generates happiness and contentment. Without forgiveness, people will live with stress and emotional pain of anger, hurt, bitterness and others that can lead to health issues. In fact, many studies find that forgiveness can improve emotional, psychological and mental well-being. Forgiveness is not only doing good to others, but most importantly, a person is doing good to his/her own self.

3. Respect

Allah S.W.T. has bestowed upon each and every human being the rights that must be recognized and acknowledged regardless of their religion, race or culture. It is simply because they are human beings and the creatures of Allah S.W.T. So, being merciful to others denotes to respect and treat everyone in a pleasant manner as commanded by Allah S.W.T. and implemented by His Prophet (p.b.u.h.). There are many ways stated in the Revelation on how to respect others. Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) states five rights of a Muslim upon another Muslim in a *Ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurairah (r.a.): “to return the greetings, to visit the sick, to accompany funeral processions, to accept an invitation and to respond to the sneezer.”¹ Meanwhile, there are six rights of non-Muslims guaranteed by Islam in general: “freedom of belief, safety of their places of worship, freedom of practicing their acts of worship, good relationship and kind treatment, observing justice and protection from oppression, and social solidarity.”²

This shows that all human beings should be respected and treated with dignity despite their differences. In another *Ḥadīth* narrated by ‘Ali bin Abī Ṭālib (r.a.), the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) stood up for a funeral although it belonged to a non-Muslim in order to show respect and thereafter he

¹ An-Nawawi, Abū Zakariyyā Muhyi ad-Dīn Yahya, *Riyāḍ as-Ṣāliḥīn* (Beirut: Mu’assasah al-Risālah, 1998), p. 108, *Ḥadīth* 238.

² El-Seoudi, A.W.M.M. & Mohamad, M.N. & Mohd Nor, Amir & Nasohah, Zaini & Ahmad, Shahzad & Alias, Muhammad Nazir & Salleh, Ahmad, “The lives of Non-Muslims and their rights in the Muslim society in Malaysia,” *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences*, 6 (7), (2012), pp. 1150-1155.

sat down.¹ Showing respect to other people does not only benefit Muslims and other human fellows in their social relationships, but it also reveals and corrects people's understanding of the true nature of Islam where mercy and peace are promoted.

4. Tolerance:

Islam teaches Muslims and other human fellows to understand and practice the element of tolerance, which is generated based on their mutual respect, in their day-to-day lives. Tolerance is an essential element of the establishment of peace in a multi-religious and multi-cultural community, where people show mercy while dealing with each other. The commitment to tolerance reflects that Islam is not based on forced conversion. Allah S.W.T. affirms this in *al-Qur'ān* where He says: “*Let there be no compulsion in religion*” (al-Baqarah, 1:256). Islam advocates that everyone has the right to choose his/her own way of life and practice it without disturbing and provoking others' ways of life and practices. Allah S.W.T. says: “*To you be your Way, and to me Mine*” (al-Kāfirūn, 109:6).

This shows that Muslims have to practice Islam as their way of life while others are allowed to practice their own ways of life based on their choice. However, it is important to mention that Allah S.W.T. never recognizes and indicates other ways of life as true as Islam is. Rather, it only acknowledges their existence in this world as *Sunnatu-Allah* (Law of Allah S.W.T.), where people are free to follow their own choices. Allah S.W.T. says: “*The Religion before Allah is Islam*” (Āli ‘Imrān, 3:19). In fact, Allah S.W.T. warns the non-believers that their rejection of Islam will result to their suffering in the Hereafter: “*Say, ‘The Truth is from your Lord’: Let him who wills believe, and let him who wills reject (it). For the wrongdoers We have prepared a fire whose (smokes and flames) like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in*” (al-Kahf, 18:29). Thus, it can be understood that Islam teaches Muslims to be tolerant towards people from other religions as long as Islam as the only true way of life is promoted.

5. Strictness

Tolerance and mercy in Islam have their limitations and boundaries. Although Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) has manifested incredible

¹ Abū Dāwūd, Sulaimān bin al-Ash‘ath, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Beirūt: Al-Maktabah al-‘Asriyah), Vol. 3, p. 204, *Ḥadīth* 3175.

mercy to other people throughout his life, but he showed strictness and firm stance in matters related to *'aqīdah* and *Shari'ah*. In a *Ḥadīth* narrated by 'Abdullah bin 'Umār (r.a.), the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said: "I have been commanded (by Allah S.W.T.) to fight people until they testify that there is no true god except Allah S.W.T., and that Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is the Messenger of Allah S.W.T., and perform *Salāt* and pay *Zakāt*. If they do so, they will have the protection of their blood and property from me except when justified by Islam, and then account is left to Allah S.W.T."¹

Based on this *Ḥadīth*, the strictness of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) in upholding the true *'aqīdah* is evident and it is actually the manifestation of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)'s mercy towards the non-believers, that is to bring them to true way of life and save them from calamities in the Hereafter. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) also does not compromise with things against *Shari'ah*. For instance, gender transitioning. This is recorded in a *Ḥadīth* narrated by Ibn 'Abbās (r.a.) that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) cursed those men who are effeminate, and women who imitate men.² Based on these *Aḥādīth*, it is clear that being merciful has its limitation in matters related to *'aqīdah* and *Shari'ah*. Thus, strictness is also a crucial element in the concept of *Raḥmatan lil 'Ālamīn* to ensure the preservation of the greatness of Islam while maintaining peace and harmony in society.

The Application of *Raḥmatan Lil 'Ālamīn* in Contemporary Context

The Islamic Sources, *al-Qur'ān* and *as-Sunnah*, provide both the theories and practices of the concept of *Raḥmatan lil 'Ālamīn*, which are certainly relevant in all times, periods, and circumstances. Nevertheless, it depends on people, communities, and nations on how they apply this concept to suit their context. Malaysian government has recently adopted and advocated this concept at the national level particularly in its administration after the 65th meeting of Malaysian National Religious Affairs Council (MKI) on 14th March 2019.³ This concept will surely benefit Malaysia to sustain a harmonious environment in its society characterized by diversity. However, it must be pointed out that mercy is not merely about kindness and compassion but firmness and strictness as well, particularly in the issue of *'aqīdah* and eradication of sin. Ahmad Sanusi and Mohd Yusuf⁴ stress that

¹ An-Nawawi, Abū Zakariyyā Muhyi al-Dīn Yahyā, *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, p. 151, *Ḥadīth* 390.

² Ibid, p. 461, *Ḥadīth* 121.

³ Meeting minutes from Parliament accessed February 18, 2020, <https://www.parlimen.gov.my/files/jindex/pdf/JDR25112019.pdf>

⁴ Ahmad Sanusi Azmi and Mohd Yusuf Ismail, "Konsep Rahmatan Lil Alamin dalam

being firm is also one of the approaches used in the concept of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn* because Islam absolutely does not tolerate infidelity and sins in the name of peace and love.

The implementation of the concept of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn* improves the life quality of people in every aspect of their lives: individual, family, community, society and country as a whole. In terms of improving the personal life of an individual, the idea of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn* encourages one to manifest good *Akhlāq* by showing kindness to all creatures of Allah S.W.T., i.e., people, animals, plants and environment. It can be through various kinds of deed such as helping people in trouble, forgiving people who have done mistakes, feeding hungry people and animals, preserving the cleanliness of environment, and many others.

In the context of a multi-religious country, an individual can practice being merciful by respecting each other's system of beliefs and traditions. One must not make fun of them, but rather study and learn others' system of beliefs and cultures. One can also emphasize on the similar teachings between the religions such as the commandments to be kind to others and helping the needy. By doing this, one can develop respect and kindness to all people irrespective of their religions. In fact, being merciful to other people does not only benefit them; rather, it benefits both. An individual who manifests mercy to other people nurtures the feelings of calmness, contentment and tranquility in his/her life. More importantly, he/she will be showered by the blessings of Allah S.W.T. In fact, to be a merciful person towards others does not necessarily require wealth or massive efforts; rather it does require simple and little acts manifested from a good *Akhlāq*.

The family institution does benefit from the concept of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn*. Indeed, family plays a vital role in building, developing and nurturing *Akhlāq Mahmūdah*, such as kindness, compassion, honesty, courage and many others among the family members. A strong and well-established family is the foundation of a stable and harmonious society. A leader of the family must be the first one to show mercy and do good to his family members before others. This is *as-Sunnah* of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) where he said: "The best of you is he who is best to his family, and I am the best among you to my family."¹ To provide *Nafqah* or sufficient necessities is one of the ways a person is being merciful to his family. Other than that, the parents can show mercy to their children by

Hadith: Penerokaan Makna Serta Aplikasi di Malaysia," *Journal of Hadith Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2018), pp. 7-8.

¹ At-Tabrīzī, Muhammad bin ‘Abdullāh, *Mishkāṭ al-Maṣābīḥ* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1985), vol. 2, p. 971, *ḥadīth* 3252.

educating them with Islamic knowledge. Through the provision of true knowledge, an individual realizes and recognizes his/her ultimate purpose of life. This enables him/her to function and grow according to Islamic teachings, which eventually build a better society.

In the multi-religious community of Malaysia, the understanding of *at-Ta'āyush* (co-existence) is important in ensuring peace and harmony in the society. *At-ta'āyush* means to coexist and live in peace and harmony regardless of different religions, faiths, ideologies or interests. Numerous initiatives have been commenced by the Malaysian government to ensure tolerance between Muslims and non-Muslims especially in matters pertaining to their religious identities. For instance, there are many festivals being celebrated in Malaysia. Some of them are cultural while some others are religious. Although Islam is the official religion of federation, Malaysian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion which includes freedom to celebrate religious festivals other than Islamic festivals. This harmonious ethic of being respectful to other religions should be preserved as it manifests the mercy of Islam.

Among the steps that can be taken by the government particularly the Muslim institutions and authorities to improve tolerance in society through the concept of *Raḥmatan lil 'Ālamīn* is to provide clear guideline on what should and should not be compromise in religious matters. The Muslims should be enlightened by the meaning of this concept and its application in daily life. This is to prevent them from being influenced by the unwanted ideologies such as pluralism, liberalism, and many others that are contradictory to the Islamic tenets. In addition, both Muslims and non-Muslims must not bring up and provoke sensitive aspects of each other's religions. Otherwise, they should be punished according to the Sedition Act 1948¹ for jeopardizing harmony in society.

Conclusion

This research paper concludes that Muslims and other fellow human beings should be reminded that a small act of mercy towards each other is truly significant. *Raḥmatan lil 'Ālamīn* with its ethical dimensions and principles advocates people to become blessings for each other in all aspects of life. Becoming an ethical person is indeed one of the ways to achieve comprehensive well-being. Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)'s life is a practical guideline on how to implement the concept of *Raḥmatan lil*

¹ The Sedition Act 1948 is the Malaysian Law which prohibits any acts, speech, publication and any other discourse which contain seditious tendency.

‘Ālamīn. It gives insights on the ways we should treat our fellow human beings. By activating this kind of spirit, we can make our world a better place by doing good and understanding each other instead of judging and discriminating.

Authentic and moderate understanding of Islam and its tenets plays a vital role in inculcating gentleness and kindness especially towards people of other religions because extremism in belief and practice will only result to rigidity and harshness. In the context of Malaysia which accommodates diversity of religions, races and cultures, the idea to instill the concept of *Raḥmatan lil ‘Ālamīn* as a foundation and principle for the government is very significant. Hopefully, it will assist to establish and sustain harmonious environment for individual, familial, communal, social, national and international levels.

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