

**Saladin: A Benevolent Man
Respected by Both Muslims and
Christians**



By: [Faysal Burhan](#)
Published: 2002

Introduction

Both Christians and Muslims admire Saladin, a celebrity of history, whose image occupied a full page of the Millennium issue of Time Magazine (inside front cover) for his chivalry and noble character. Saladin's traits and virtues were purely a reflection of the teachings of his faith. He defeated the Crusaders, known to Muslims as the Franks, and recaptured Jerusalem in 1187. The experience of the Crusaders with the Muslims demonstrates that Muslims and Christians are not in a "civilizational" clash, but rather in a "civilizational" bondage.



Image of Saladin, front cover (inside) – The Millennium Issue of Time Magazine, December 31, 1999

In 1099 Jerusalem had fallen to the First Crusaders, (historians refer to the many crusader's armies, by First Crusader, Second, etc..) slaughtering its Christian, Muslim and Jewish inhabitants after promising them safety. They did not spare the lives of the elderly, women or children. The Latin Kingdom formed in the following year, lasted until Saladin destroyed King Guy's army at the Horns of Hettin in 1187 and shortly after recovered Jerusalem. In stark contrast to the Crusades 88 years earlier, Saladin, adhering to the teachings of Islam, did not slaughter the city's Christian inhabitants. Saladin's noble act won him the respect of his opponents and many others from around the world.

King Richard I of England, better known as Richard the Lionheart, who led the Third Crusade in 1189 to recover the Holy City, met Saladin in a conflict that was to be celebrated in later chivalric romances. Although the Crusaders failed in their purpose, Richard the Lionheart gained Saladin's lifelong respect as a worthy opponent. Saladin's generosity and sense of honor in negotiating the peace treaty that ended the Crusade won him the lasting admiration and gratitude of the Christian World.

I quote the Millennium Issue of Time Magazine (December 31, 1999) that dedicated a full page for an artist's image of Saladin: "When Dante Alighieri compiled his great medieval Who's Who of heroes and villains in the Divine Comedy, among the highest a non-Christian could climb was Limbo, Homer, Caesar, Plato and Dante's guide Vergil. But, perhaps what should not be most surprising in his catalog of "Great Hearted Souls" was a figure, "solitary, set apart," that figure was Saladin. 'When Dante, the most Christ-centered verse ever penned, wrote lionizing his name, Saladin had been dead for one hundred years.'" This solitary figure in Dante's Divine Comedy stands today as it did in the past as a testament to his extraordinary stature.

Perhaps Dante, as well as many other men and women who, like Dante, celebrated Saladin's name, had no trouble understanding that his honorable acts were not "infidel," and that God had indeed favored the faithful. Many Crusaders discovered that Muslims, like them, possess virtues the Christians considered sacred. In fact, some Christians thought that "Saladin had European blood in his veins and was a Christian knight at heart." To Muslims, Saladin was more than just a warrior. He was a man of piety and true faith and vision; he was a builder, a patron of literature and chivalry.

Saladin's Birth and Lineage

Saladin was born in Tikrite (a city on the Tigris River), Iraq in 1137. His family was of Kurdish ancestry.

The Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad, al Mustarshid, had appointed his father Ayyub, an earnest Muslim, skilled in administration and diplomacy, as the governor of the town.

Saladin's Actual Name

Saladin's real name is Yusuf or Joseph. In Medieval times, Arabic names carried a lot of information. They included the father's name, sometimes a line of ancestors (in the interest of genealogy), nickname, and honorific names. His honorific name, Salah al-Din means the "righteousness of the faith" or "cream of the religion." I looked it up and all periods and commas are to be put inside the quotation marks. You were right, I was wrong. His full name is Salah al-Din Abu 'l-Muzaffer Yusuf ibn Ayyub ibn Shadi, which consists of his honorific name, Salah al-Din, his domestic name, Yusuf, his nickname, Abu 'l Muzaffer (father of the Victorious), and a father and a grandfather's names, Ayyub (Job) and Shadi. This long name is often preceded by the Title: Al Malik al Nasir, "the empowering king of the weak and helpless." To the Crusaders, all that complexity was simply reduced to: 'Saladin.'

Childhood and Education

Saladin received his early childhood education in Baalbek and Damascus, Syria. In 1143, when Saladin was six years old, Sultan Zengi of Musel appointed his father Ayyub as the governor of Baalbek. Sultan Zengi defeated the Crusaders south of Aleppo in 1130 and in 1144 recovered the city of Edessa. When Zengi died in 1146, his son Nur al-Din succeeded him. Nur al-Din was a respected devout leader. After few years, Nur al-Din appointed Ayyub as the Head of Damascus Militia. Ayyub's younger brother, Shirkuh, who was an officer, was promoted to a senior command in the military establishment in Aleppo.

Saladin grew up at the center stage where political decisions regarding the Crusades were made. His cultural and religious education was typical of the environments surrounding Baalbek and Damascus. Like his young peers, Saladin learned Arabic, poetry, the formal prayers and memorized what was required of him to memories of the Qur'an and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad. Saladin had a great interest in learning Islam's principles regarding Christians and Jews, the People of the Book. Perhaps his interest goes beyond basic knowledge for at least two reasons. First, on the night he was born, his family along with his uncle Shirkuh's family, was forced to leave Tikrit to Musel by Caliph al-Mustarshid. This action was a punishment because Shirkuh had killed a Christian for no good reason. Secondly, the Christian Crusade's horrific barbarity in Jerusalem was fresh in every individual. For the young Saladin, as well as his peers, what did not add up perhaps was that their faith calls for noble treatment of the People of the Book, yet Christians invaded their land and carried out the massacre of Jerusalem.

The Status of Religion

Saladin grew up in a Muslim society that was powerfully influenced by Sufism. Sufism is a school of Islam whose members seek higher spiritual life and closer intimacy with God. The essence and divine values of the religion of Islam were the centers of practice as opposed to a superficial practice. The degree of closeness to God by the virtue of thikr, the private and congregational meditation and recollection of God in the heart and mind, and the work for tazkiyah (purification of inner-self and soul) was an everyday norm.

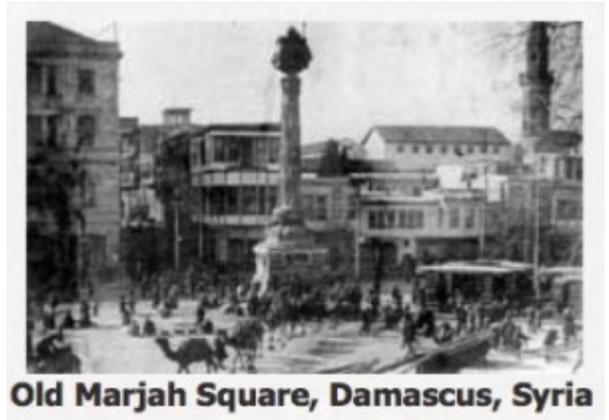
The divine principles such as chivalry, piety, nobility, justice, humbleness, generosity, caring, love, brotherhood, mercy and forgiveness were a living reality in hearts and minds of the majority of Muslims. Publicly and privately, people were crowded in the circles of ilm, knowledge. These knowledge circles were conducted at the marketplace, homes, mosques, libraries, schools, clubs and other convention centers.

Furthermore, homes, schools, and mosques were built with provisions for private seclusion with God and for tarbiyah, the ethical and religious education with training and discipline. As a result of *tarbiyah* (education with training) and tazkiyah, the individual would be set on the tracks of self-discovery of God; the deeper the faith in the hearts, the closer the intimacy with God and His Prophets. Many Muslim festivals, including the birth of Prophet Muhammad, were widely celebrated. For example, the Governor of Irbid, Geukhburi, Saladin's brother-in-law used to hold a four-day festival for the birth of Prophet Muhammad. He used to serve food, conduct lectures, chants and meditation during this festival.

The Prophet's love and respect in the minds and hearts of those believers were so real, to the point whereby just hearing the name of the Prophet, some believers used to sit upright from their inclined posture in reverence and respect of the Holy Prophet. Others would be moved to tears in admiration and the elucidation of the experience. The Muslim's education during this time was greatly influenced by the illumination of one of the greatest Muslim thinkers ever, Imam Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058-1110).

Damascus: A Powerful Religious Center

Damascus was the second learning center in the Islamic Dynasty. The city was the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate (635-750) and the home of many scholars including Muhammad al-Ghazali. Islam is a rich system of divine values and a truly spiritual experience. From this vantage point, Al-Ghazali powerfully influenced the intellectual world. In this regard, P.H. Newby in his book, *Saladin In His Time* stated: "Had it not been for al-Ghazali, Saladin would have been a fundamentalist in practice because al-Ghazali was largely responsible for making mysticism respectable.



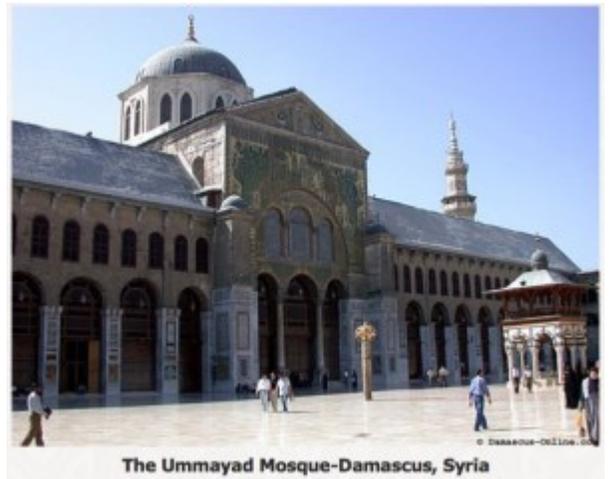
Old Marjah Square, Damascus, Syria

For al-Ghazali, the Sufi (from suf the garment Sufis wore) path was one that led out of the despair into which, at a crucial period of his life, he had fallen. His "dark night of the soul" came when he was a professor at the Nizamiya University in Baghdad and found that for all his mastery of scholastic theology, he was without the spiritual experience necessary for that truly religious life, which would ensure bliss in the world to come. His illumination came after years of ascetic contemplation. Al-Ghazali's search for truth tested the limits of human knowledge. As a result of his experience, he wrote *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* which showed that true religion was not achieved merely by rituals or by mastering a lot of information (important though both of these were) but through a living awareness of divine values."

It is important to note that these exquisite values were the traits of Saladin and the thrust by which he exercised during the course of events with the Crusaders.

The Umayyad Mosque and the Church of John the Baptist

According to the Spanish Muslim traveler Ibn Jubayr, who was a contemporary of Saladin, Damascus was a haven for all: Christians, Jews, and Muslims. He stated; "Damascus was the most populated city in the world." Behind the city walls, the streets were narrow, lined with three-story houses of mud and reeds. The bazaars were noisy with metal workers and fragrant with spices. There were many public baths. There were twenty colleges for students of law and religion and a large free hospital. The Orthodox Christian church of St. Mary was brilliant with mosaics and worshippers were free to practice their religion. The rich Jewish community of some 3000, many of them refugees from the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, ran their own university.



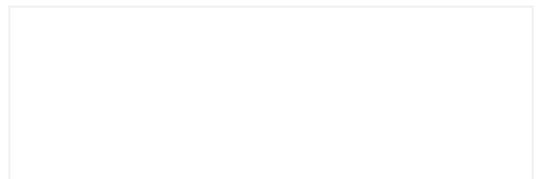
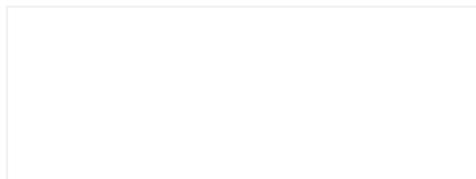
The Umayyad Mosque-Damascus, Syria

The most splendid building was the great Umayyad Mosque. Within the three-aisled basilica of the original church, the walls were covered with mosaics representing the great cities of the Muslim world and an overhead was an onion shaped dome, the Dome of the Eagle, within which was a gilded and painted cupola. From the height of the dome, men could be seen in the great courtyard reduced to the size of small children, a dizzying experience. The Mosque possessed a couple of brazen falcons. Every two hours they dropped brass balls from their beaks into brass cups, from where the balls returned to the interior of the device. At night a water clock operated a system of lights behind colored glass.

But more important than these marvels was the teaching that regularly went on in the Mosque. The scholar with his back to a pillar and his students around him were sometimes moved to tears of appreciation by the elegance of his exposition. See P.H. Newby in his book, *Saladin In His Time*.

Umayyad Mosque-Damascus, Syria

There were and still are three minarets, one of them, the very first



ever built, the Minaret of the Bride, was not just a place from where the muezzin could make his call to prayer but a building with sizable apartments for occupation by scholars who, as was then customary, passed from one center of learning to another.

The second minaret is called the Minaret of Jesus. Prophet Jesus, as Muslims believe, will be returning to earth and will start his call from this minaret. Muslims and Christians together will then respond to his call. The Grand Mufti of Syria, Shaykh Ahmad Kufaro calls on both Muslims and Christians to work together paving the road for his return.



Minaret of the Bride,
Umayyad Mosque-
Damascus, Syria



Minaret of Jesus, Umayyad
Mosque-Damascus, Syria

The Mosque was originally east of St. John Baptist Church. Muslims and Christians for seventy years performed their rituals side by side, before the Mosque expansion during Caliph al-Walid ibn Abdul Malek, in 705. He bought St. John Baptist Church from the Christians in exchange for four other churches in the city. Today, the tomb of John the Baptist stands in the center of the Umayyad Mosque along with the original baptismal well and stone-made pot.

Saladin's Early Adulthood

The expectation of life in the Middle Ages was short, so as a result, the youth were given responsibilities of manhood at an early age. Saladin was fourteen years old when he got married. He was then sent to his uncle Shirkuh in Aleppo on a career that would lead to his becoming one of Nur al Din's emirs. The devout Nur al-Din soon became a great mentor for the young Saladin. Sultan Nur al-Din, who succeeded his father, Zengi in 1146, respected scholars and endured knowledge and turned Syria into a large intellectual center. He built and funded schools and hospitals. In the presence of a scholar, the Sultan was known to rise to his feet as a sign of respect and invite him to sit next to him. He promoted the divine values of Islam and governed in the light of the Qur'an. Nur al-Din lived austere and had little money for himself. When his wife complained that she had no money to buy clothes, he replied,

"I have no more. Of all the wealth I have at my disposal, I am but the custodian for the Muslims, and I do not intend to deceive them over this and cast myself into hell-fire for your sake."

He set up the Court of Appeals over which he presided in person, to deal with administrative injustices. Saladin regularly attended the Court of Appeals as a student and was associated with his master, Nur al-Din. In this court, Saladin learned to appreciate the wisdom and justice of the Islamic Law as it applied to the injustices and criminals. Nur al-Din was the first Muslim ruler who saw that the jihad against the invading Crusaders could only be successful if Muslim states were united and soon began implementing this unity. Such was the man who, next to his own father, Saladin respected more than any others. Even though there were differences between Nur al-Din and Saladin over certain policies in Egypt, one thing was sure, he never ceased to follow Nur al-Din's example uniting his people, implementing the divine systems of Islam and keeping nothing for himself.

Saladin's Adulthood

Saladin, who learned his military lessons in Nur al-Din's militia at the hands of his uncle Shirkuh, soon began to stand out among Nur al-Din's leaders. In 1164, at the age of 26, he was an assistant to his uncle Shirkuh in an expedition to rescue Egypt from an invasion by Amalric, king of Jerusalem. Saladin made a lasting impression on his peers during this expedition. They were able to escape the Crusader Castle of Kerak, which was precisely built to interrupt communication between Syria and Egypt and to attack Muslim merchants and pilgrim caravans.

In 1169 Saladin with his uncle Shirkuh, was on another expedition to Egypt to defend it against yet another Crusader attack. This time he was a second-commander-in-chief of the Syrian army. When Shirkuh died the same year, Saladin assumed his uncle's position. Later, he was able to rule Cairo and defeat the Fatimid who ruled Egypt.

Egypt soon turned into an Ayyubid Dynasty. Among the local achievements, he boosted the Egyptian economy and improved education. He mobilized Egypt to face the Crusaders and built a great number of Islamic schools all over Egypt. He also gave school administrators and teachers good salaries. These schools soon attracted many scholars from Asia and Europe. The Jewish Physician Ibn Maymun, known as Maimonides (d.1204), who became Saladin's personal physician, had come from Andalusia. With so many scholars and schools, Egypt soon developed into a large intellectual center. Saladin borrowed this idea from his father Ayyub and Nur al-Din, who had earlier turned Syria into a large intellectual center. When Ayyub was in Baalbek, he built a Sufi-convert establishment there. He followed the standards of Sultan Zengi who had earlier built one in Musel.

At the age of 45, Saladin was the most powerful figure in the Muslim world. When Nur ed-Din died in 1174, the Syrian princes gave their allegiance to Saladin and Damascus became his home. In Damascus, like Nur al-Din, he presided every Tuesday and Thursday at the Hall of Justice. He rectified the wrongs, ordered the oppressor to recompense, and listened to his subjects with his own ears, without an intermediary. If there was a matter which he himself was a part of, he surrendered his place to the judge and sat at the side of the plaintiff. If the judge ruled against him, he executed the order.

In twelve years Saladin united Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, the Western parts of the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen under the Ayyubid Dynasty. Saladin used diplomacy and the administrative skills in piecing together this badly divided region. Furthermore, he only appointed rulers whom he trusted and who shared his vision. Their appointment was primarily to ensure that his back was secured when he faced the Crusaders and that a continuous supply of food and assistance could not be interrupted. When he felt that this strategy was weakened due to a governors' dispute or quarrel, he would soon work to remove the dispute by pleasing the disputants with more revenue or territories.

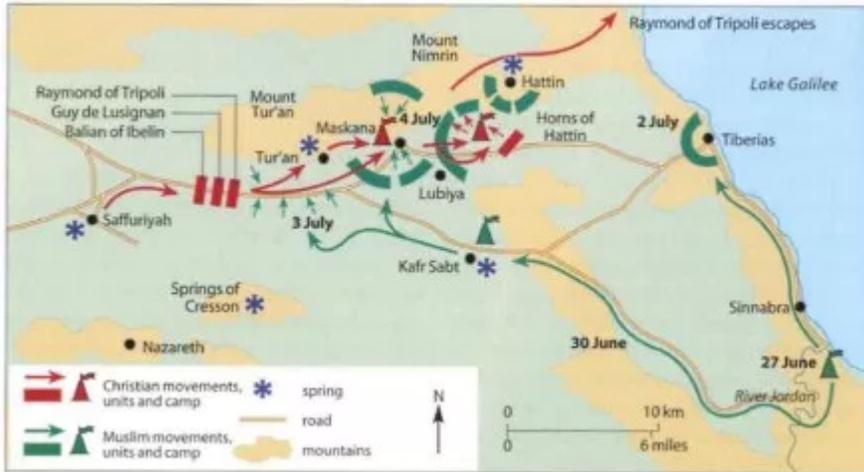
Saladin's scope of vision was that he gave each situation its due attention and weight, and he never broke a bridge of diplomacy or peace initiative with his opponents. The power or wealth he acquired never spoiled him; in fact, power and position did not mean anything to him. Despite his advisor's request to keep some of the revenue he received from Egypt and Syria, he never kept any of it. When he died, his wealth was only a few dinars. All the revenue he received, he channeled to his soldiers and emirs to ensure their loyalty to him. Saladin was a man of restless energy geared to serve his goal in driving the invaders out of his country.

The Decisive Battle of Hittin

In return for an attack made by the Crusaders of the Kerak on Muslim pilgrims in 1187, Saladin moved his army to northern Palestine and defeated the much larger Crusader army in the decisive battle of Hittin (July 4, 1187). Three months after this battle, Saladin captured Jerusalem. Unlike the Christians eighty eight years earlier, who made Jerusalem a bloodbath, Saladin did not loot, murder or seek revenge for the Muslims. He spared the lives of 100,000 Christians and allowed Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem after its fall.

In this benevolent act, Saladin was simply emulating Prophet Muhammad as the Prophet re-entered his birth-city of Mecca. When Muhammad returned to Mecca with ten thousand people, he entered it without any bloodshed. He told its people with his famous words: "Go about (wherever you please), for you are set free." Muhammad's generous act to the people of Mecca was made despite the 20 years of constant attacks, torture, extradition, and execution that he and his companions had been receiving from them.

This is indeed an example of nobility in forgiving when you are strong and able. Forgiveness is also the teachings of Christianity. In fact, the Bible is "a gospel of love," and there is no reference in the Gospels



for violence and murdering innocent people, such as the massacre the Crusaders carried out in Jerusalem in 1099. On the contrary, the Bible teaches:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
Matthew, 5:44

If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also.
Luke, 6:29

Recapturing Jerusalem shocked the West and as such, it brought about the Third Crusade led by Richard the Lionheart, King of

England in 1189. The Third Crusade army was the combined armies of England, France, and Austria. Salah al-Din's army (composed mainly from Egyptians, Syrians and volunteer Turks) checked the massive Frankish armies and weakened them in a war of attrition on the land of Palestine. In the end, the expedition failed to enter Jerusalem. It was during this period Richard negotiated peace with Saladin and gained a lasting respect for him. This was because Saladin was leveraged to make no peace treaty. His army was strong and in control, while the Third Crusade army was exhausted. Furthermore, King Richard was determined to go back to his country. It was Saladin's generosity and sense of honor in negotiating this treaty which ended the Crusades and won him the lasting admiration and gratitude of the Christian world.

Saladin was precisely following the teaching of the Qur'an and philosophy of Islam in the prevention of bloodshed that says:

But if they (the enemy) incline towards peace, do you (also) incline towards peace. Qur'an, 8:61

Magnanimity and Benevolence at Work

Chivalric romance often times is no more than an act, a dream or a wish, but for Saladin and the Muslims it was a living reality. In his 28 years of battling the Crusaders, Saladin left many heart-touching impressions in the minds and hearts of his opponents as a reminder of his magnanimity. The author selected few of these stories as follows in order to help the reader understand why Saladin became a legendary figure in the Western world.

A) Prevention of Christian Bloodbath

After capturing Jerusalem in October 1187, Saladin's civilized act in signing the peace treaty and saving Christian blood was indeed a pious act. He not only spared the lives of 100,000 Christians but also guaranteed their safe departure along with their property and belongings. They were given forty days to prepare for departure. In this way, eighty-four thousand of them left the city to their relatives or co-religionists in the coastal line of Syria in perfect safety. What is important to understand is that Saladin was in a strong position to seek revenge for his people. He did not go this route, however, because his faith taught him otherwise to be merciful, forgive and make no revenge. God said in the Holy Qur'an:

The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from God: for (God) loves not those who do wrong.
Qur'an, 42:40

The Holy Qur'an also states:

Seek not mischief in the land, God does not love mischief makers. Qur'an, 28:77

Let us stop here to reflect on the example of the magnanimity of Prophet Muhammad's mercy even on his opponents. When Prophet Muhammad was extremely tired from the rejection of his people in Mecca, he went to Ta'iff (150 kilometers southwest of Mecca) calling its people to worship God. There he was

utterly turned down by its three leaders. The first leader told him: "If God sent you, I will tear down the hangings of Ka'bah." The second leader said to him: "Could God find not but you to send?" As for the third leader, who learned the news of the other two totally refused to meet with him, but sent his servant with this message: "I do not need to speak to you. For, if you are a messenger from God as you claim, then you are too great of a person for me to address and if you are a liar, it is not befitting for me to speak to you."

Despite this type of denial and humiliation, the Prophet returned back once more to the leaders of Ta'iff asking them for protection (asylum), since he left Mecca, he could no longer enter it without protection. His request was again turned down. Then he asked them to conceal his news of rejection from the people of Mecca. Their answer was denied. Instead, they insisted to deliver the bad news to Mecca. Finally, he asked for their permission to speak to their people, they not only refused but as he was leaving town, heart-broken, they stirred up their servants and children to insult him and throw rocks and stones at him. As a result, he was cut in his head and bled so severely that his shoes were saturated with blood. As he reached the outskirts of Ta'iff, he made this prayer:

O my God, unto You I complain of my weakness, of my helplessness, and of my lowliness before men. O Most Merciful of the merciful, You are Lord of the weak. And You are my Lord. Into whose hands will You entrust me? Unto some far off stranger who will ill-treat me? Or unto a foe whom You have empowered against me? I care not if Your wrath is not on me...-Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah

Upon this, the Angel of Mountains came to the service of Prophet Muhammad, asking his permission to close the two mountains on the people of Ta'iff. But despite his wound, the compassionate Muhammad replied, "No, God may bring from their offspring people who would testify to the oneness of God and worship Him." In this example, the Prophet was so companionate that he denied himself and refused the request to punish the people who rejected him in the anticipation that at one point in the future they or their offspring may come to realize the truth. Saladin clearly followed the example of the Prophet in saving the lives of Christians.

B) Releasing prisoners Unable TO Pay Their Ransom

Part of the condition of the surrender of Jerusalem was that each Christian pays his or her ransom. Thousands of Christians, mainly women, were not able to pay their ransom. To save them from slavery, al-Adel, Saladin's brother, Geukburi, Saladin's brother-in-law and Saladin paid their ransom out of their own pockets. This act was done in spite of the fact that some rich Christians such as the Patriarch, Heraclius and Madame la Patriarchesse of Jerusalem had so much wealth that they had currency by the load. When Saladin was advised to confiscate the Patriarch and the la Patriarchesse's wealth to use it as a ransom for the poor Christians, he refused to go back on his word and turned his advisors' request down. He allowed the wealthy Christians to depart with all their wealth intact. Saladin was only faithfully responding to God's call that said:

"Fulfill the covenant of God when you have entered into it, and break not your oaths after you have confirmed them; indeed you have made God your surety; for God knows all that you do." Qur'an, 16:91

Regarding this event, Karen Armstrong, author of the book, Jerusalem, One City, Three Faiths stated:

Christians in the West were uneasily aware that Muslim leaders had behaved in far more 'Christian' than had their own Crusaders.

C) Beyond Justice

During the forty days respite that was given to the Westerners to leave Jerusalem, several Christian women approached Saladin stating that their guardians (husbands, fathers or sons) were missing. They explained to Saladin that they had no one to look after them, nor did they have any shelter. The tender-hearted Saladin broke into tears upon hearing their case. He ordered his soldiers to find their missing guardians and that for those whose guardians were determined dead, they should be given a liberal compensation.

Could this act of Saladin not be seen as a chivalric romance at heart? Indeed, this act is only one of the many divine traits of Islam. Having a Muslim paying a ransom to a family of a soldier killed fighting other Muslims is certainly an act beyond justice and a gracious act at heart. Let's show the principle of courtesy and compassion in the teachings of Islam in matters similar to our story of the Christian women.

Quraysh, the people of Mecca, who drove the Muslims out of their homes and attacked them at the wells of Badr and where they lost many of their leaders, came in the following year with 3000 fighters seeking revenge for their people and to attack the one thousand Muslims at Mount Uhud. On the way to the mount, the Prophet lost 300 of his people in a betrayal act. The loss of this many of his people took place prior to the crucial time of the engagement with the enemy. The reason for this disloyal act was that Abdullah ibn Abi Salul was dissatisfied by the location of the battlefield at Mount Uhud, which was earlier selected by the majority of the Muslims, over his own proposal to meet the enemy in the city of Medina itself. Abdullah ibn Abi Salul later became the leader of the hypocrites. Despite deserting the Muslims before a major engagement with their enemy, Allah revealed the following verse that emphasizes rationality and consideration before any action and to give a chance to the defectors to recognizing the wrong they did and to become better Muslims.

Those of you who turned back on the day the two hosts met, –it was Satan who caused them to fail, because of some (evil) they had done. But God has blotted out (their fault), for God is Oft-forgiving, Most Forbearing. Qur’an, 3:155

A religion that teaches this kind of courtesy and forgiveness, even under such crucial circumstances cannot be a religion of violence. It was this philosophy of Islam that inspired Saladin to deal courteously with the Christian women who lost their guardians.

D) “Victory is changing the hearts of your opponents by gentleness and kindness.” Saladin In September 1192, during the siege of Acre, King Richard the Lionheart gained a lasting respect for Saladin. When Richard fell sick, Saladin sent him his own physician to treat him. Along with this health care, he frequently sent him ice to cool down his fever and plum fruits that were necessary for his recovery. In this noble act, Saladin was precisely submitting to the call of the Holy Qur’an that said:

It may be that God will grant love (and friendship) between you and those whom you hold as enemies. For God has power (over all things); and God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Qur’an, 60:7

This noble philosophy of prevention of bloodshed and the making of enemies as friends is precisely the philosophy of Islam and the practice of Prophet Muhammad. (See [Islam: Legacy of Peace for more details](#)).

E) A Pure Chivalric Romance

During an offense made by King Richard against a Muslim squadron under Saladin’s son al Zaher, King Richard’s horse was killed and the King of England had fallen to the ground. Observing this scene, Saladin sent him two remounts so that he would not be at a disadvantage. “I was assured,” wrote Beha al-Din when the King was down, “by men who were there that the King of England with lance in his hand, walked along the length of our army from right to left and not one of our soldiers left the rank to attack him.”

Some people may have seen acts like this but only in movies and dreams. For the benevolent Saladin and for King Richard of England, this chivalry was a true knight’s romance and such is the character of Muslims.

F) Recovery of a Snatched Child

During the siege of Acre, a Christian woman came to Saladin’s camp weeping and wailing, insisting that her child was snatched away by his soldiers. He was moved to tears by the pitiful condition of the woman and he found the child returned him to his mother. He also provided a horse for them to return safely back to their camp.

G) Romance in the Freedom of Religion

Through an interpreter, Saladin used to communicate with virtually all the prisoners of war. During the siege of Acre, several soldiers were captured. Among them was an old man who was so old that he was toothless and could hardly walk. Saladin questioned him as to why he was he there. The old man said that he had no thought but to make a pilgrimage to the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. Saladin was so touched by his answer and condition that he provided a horse for him and ordered that he be escorted to Jerusalem to fulfill his worship dream. Can this act be seen anything less than romance in the freedom of belief? See [Islam Denounces Violence for Islam’s philosophy of freedom of belief](#). Historically and philosophically no one can question Islam’s tolerance of other faiths and ethnicities.

H) Mischief is Not Tolerated

Among the captures in the battle of Hittin were Crusade leaders such as King Guy of Jerusalem, Raymond of Syden, and Raymond of Chatillon. King Guy and Raymond of Syden were released and escorted to safety but Raymond of Chatillon of the Kerak Castle, who had often ambushed emissaries, pilgrim and merchant caravans, burned crops and destroyed fruit trees and vegetation, was not spared. Before his execution, however, Saladin gave him the chance to become a Muslim and repent, but he refused.

I) A Wedding Spared Bombardment

In 1183, in the Castle of Kerak, during the wedding ceremony of Humphery of Toraon, who was marrying Isabella, a royal princess, his mother Lady Stephanie, sent out to Saladin some dishes prepared for the wedding asking that "he not be outdone in gallantry." Saladin asked which part of the castle housed the young couple and gave orders that it would not be bombarded. It was these and other charming Islamic values and practices that made Christians in the East eagerly identify with Muslims over the barbarism of the Crusades. Many of the Christian churches in the upper Euphrates (Armenian Catholics) wrote letters in cheer to Saladin for the death of Fredrick Barbarossa, King of Germany and the break up of his 200,000 Crusade army. King Barbarossa was planning to attack Syria from the north and defend the Franks. He died in the Balkans while crossing a river; his army broke up and never made it to Syria. The Byzantine Emperor, Isaac Angelus also tried to stop the German Crusade from entering his territory but was not able to.

Conclusion

Saladin was an honorable leader. His character and charitable deeds demonstrated to the Crusaders that they had been misinformed and that Muslims were not "infidels." On the contrary, the Crusaders discovered that Muslims possessed virtues that they consider Christian values.

Saladin's chivalric and high standards were the "soul" of the plays and romances created by Sir Walter Scott that eventually moved into the young adult books and journals throughout Europe and the West. Saladin was merely a window from which only a few of the high standards of Islam were seen and experienced by the Crusaders. The French historian Rene Grousse truly said it all when he described Saladin saying:

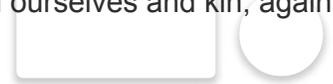
It is equally true that his generosity, his piety, devoid of fanaticism, that flower of liberality and courtesy which had been the model of our old chroniclers, won him no less popularity in Frankish Syria than in the lands of Islam.

The experience of the Crusades with the Muslims unmistakably proves that Christian and Muslim "civilizations" were not, are not, and could not "clash." The indisputable philosophy that backs history leaves no doubt that the information Mr. Samuel Huntington presented in his book, Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order is futile.

As we have seen, the actual Crusader's war with the Muslims revealed much of the internal dynamics and plurality of the Muslims in Western civilization. Furthermore, much of the conflicts he used to support his hypothesis were highly political and false at best. For example, Mr. Huntington lists the US bombing of Baghdad as an evidence of clash. Mr. Huntington did not state that the immediate reason for the US attacking Iraq was that Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 and that the real reason was "to protect the US interest in the region."

In another example, Mr. Huntington lists a single ordinary individual as "conspiracy against the US," the Egyptian Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman. Irrespective of his view of the US, how could this single and blind man represent a "clash of civilization?" Mr. Huntington also uses the "fighting between the Croats and Bosnian Muslims" as another indicator of the clash of these civilizations. This is another bogus example. The world has not forgotten that Mr. Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian mastermind of the Croats and Bosnian war was killing Albanian and Bosnian Muslims in the name of "ethnic cleansing." Because of this "uncivilized" act, the US in 1999 moved to support and aid the Bosnian Muslims, and not to clash with them.

Men and women of intellect and wisdom of all faiths must not fall victim to deception or hidden agendas. People of faith must no longer allow fanatics to invoke war and bloodshed upon ourselves and kin, again in the name of religion. I quote the Qur'an:



God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion. Qur'an, 16:90

You who believe! Enter absolutely into peace (Islam). Do not follow the footsteps of Satan. He is an outright enemy of you. Qur'an, 2:208

The experience of the Crusaders with Saladin and the Muslims speaks loudly the truth. I quote P.H. Newby, stating:

The Crusades were fascinated by a Muslim leader who possessed virtues they assumed were Christian. To them, to his Muslim contemporaries and to us, it still remains remarkable that in times as harsh and bloody as these a man of great power should have been so little corrupted by it.

The 9/11 Attacks on the USA

Today, is history about to repeat itself? Were the terrorist's attacks of 9/11/2001 on the USA skillfully designed to engage the Muslim/Christian world in yet another major war? Are the beneficiaries of war virtuous Christians and Muslims? Although it was Muslim names that were associated with the horrible events of 9/11, Islam certainly does not approve of their action. Furthermore, the magnitude and sophistication of the 9/11 attacks do not leave any doubt that a major power, highly sophisticated, was behind it.

The communities of faith and interfaith must unite in the face of all evil. We must not allow the wicked to abuse our religions, encourage bigotry and deeper division among people of different faiths for profit. The Christian/Muslim experience of the Crusades demonstrates that the two civilizations share more in common to engage in a comradeship than in differences.

Bibliography

Armstrong, Karen, Jerusalem, One City, Three Faiths, 1997. The New York Times, Ballantine Books, New York.

Biema, David Van. Saladin (c. 1138-1193). Time Magazine, December 31, 1999.

Grousse, Reneeh, The Epic of the Crusades. Orion Press, 1970.

Huntington, Samuel P. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order. Simon & Schuster. New York.

Newby, P. H. Saladin in his Time, 1992. Dorset Press, New York.

Shakir, Mustapha, Salah al Din al-Farisu al-Mujahid wa al-Maliku al-Zahid, 1998. Daru al-Qalam, Beirut, Lebanon.