

A Glimpse of the Character Traits of the Prophet Muhammad

Part I

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Introduction

Since the foundation of Islam up to the present day, biographers, historians, and narrators of tradition have gathered details about the life of the holy Prophet in thousands of their works and compilations and have thus placed rich and valuable sources of information within the reach of researchers. However, in most of these works, the characteristics of the life of the Prophet have not been categorized in an orderly manner but are instead, rather disorderly. Therefore, it is not easy to become acquainted with these characteristics. In addition, as most of these works have been written in Arabic, they are inaccessible to those who are unfamiliar with this language. The technological lifestyle of the present age further aggravates the situation because rather than providing more time and opportunity for human beings, against all expectations, it has caused time constraints and has prevented people from spending time reading these detailed works. For this reason, and with regards to the significance of the topic in hand, the writer of this article, while acknowledging his poor knowledge, will seek to place within the reach of readers, a brief summary of the way of life of the Prophet. Rumi says:

“If you cannot drink [all] the ocean’s water,

take a sip of it to quench your thirst.”

Efforts have been made to use information that is in conformity with what is unanimously agreed upon by, or widely known among the historians and the reliable narrators of tradition.

1. Childhood

Muhammad’s father, ‘Abdullah, died at a young age away from his birthplace and kinsfolk, without knowing that his wife was expecting and that he was leaving behind a precious legacy for the world of humanity. ‘Abdullah was the most beloved of the sons of ‘Abd al-Muttalib, who sacrificed one hundred camels for him and distributed the meat among the needy. ‘Abdullah did not return from a trade journey to Syria. He died in Medina a few days after falling ill and was buried in the house of a member of the tribe of Banu Najjar [*Dār al-Nābighah*].

‘Abd al-Muttalib was very upset at this tragic loss but his deep grief and heartbreak was somewhat alleviated by his newborn grandson, the only memory of ‘Abdullah left to him. He found peace of mind in him and came to love the child ardently. On the seventh day after his birth, he named him Muhammad (the praised one). This name was rare among the Arabs of the time. It is reported that upon being asked why ‘Abdul-Muttalib had named his grandson in this way, he replied:

I did so with the desire that my grandson would be praised by God in Heaven and by men on earth.¹

It seemed as if he inwardly knew his grandson’s destiny, and the name Muhammad, which befitted his grandson, had been inspired.

It was the general custom of the Arabs who lived in towns to send their children away to Bedouin wet nurses. It was believed that growing up in the free and healthy surroundings of the desert would be deeply effective in aiding the physical and mental development as well as the eloquent speech and gallantry of

children. Therefore, ‘Abd al-Muttalib entrusted the young Muhammad (s) into the care of Halimah, daughter of ‘Abdullah ibn Harith, who belonged to the noble tribe of the Banu Sa’d.

Muhammad (s) lived for about six years in this tribe and with the passage of time, he developed well both physically and mentally. He became more mature than others of the same age in every respect. He was cleaner, more joyful, and more magnanimous than all the other children. At the age of six, Halimah took Muhammad (s) to his mother. This noble lady was still grieving the death of her beloved husband and thinking of her only orphaned child brought more sadness to her tender heart.

In order to show her fidelity, to relieve her deep sorrow, and to revisit the grave of her husband, who had left her a few days after their marriage, she set out for the long journey to Medina (at that time known as *Yathrib*), accompanied by her beloved son. Muhammad (s) went with her so that he too could shed tears over the grave of his father and sympathize with his mother, since he had already been deprived of his caress, smiles, and care. Amina stayed in Medina for a whole month, and every day she would sit at the grave of her husband and relieve her burning heart through her tears. This painful sight was imprinted on the memory of Muhammad (s). Later, during the emigration, while he was passing through the lanes of Medina, he recognized a house and said that he had been in it with his mother and it was there that his father lay buried.²

The deep grief and heavy blow suffered by her at the early stage of her married life led to Aminah’s premature death. On her journey back to Mecca, she fell ill and died at a place called *Abwā’*. Muhammad (s) was now completely orphaned. Upon the death of his mother whose presence, love, and care he was in need of, the six year-old boy’s tender and sensitive heart became mournful. His subtle spirit was overcome with an unforgettable grief. It has been recorded that after fifty-five years, during the journey for performing the compensatory or lesser pilgrimage

(*‘umrat al-qaḡā*), Muhammad (s) passed the grave of his mother, where he stopped and wept so much that those present there were also moved to tears. It is said that it was the memory of the affection of his mother that moved him to tears.³

2. Under the care of ‘Abd al-Mutallib

Umm Ayman (or Barakah, a notable African woman who was highly esteemed by the noble Prophet), took him to Medina and left him with ‘Abd al-Muttalib. Seeing the child bereft of his mother aroused ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s pity and affection and his love for his grandson increased. He loved him more than all of his own children⁴ and never left him. Even when an assembly of the Quraysh nobles was held in the Sacred Mosque (*masjid al-harām*), ‘Abd al-Muttalib would sit in a prominent place and let Muhammad (s) sit on the couch, and whenever his uncles wanted to drive the child away from the seat of his father, he would prevent them from doing so saying, “Leave my son alone”. He foretold, based on his inspiration or insight, that his grandson would have a very bright future.⁵ However, even the amount of love and affection shown by his grandfather could never fill the gap caused by the loss of his parents. Muhammad (s) most often displayed his grief within the context of the following moral lesson:

Stroke the heads of the orphans and honour those who are away from their homes, because I became an orphan as a child, and as an adult, I became afflicted with the pain of being away from home.⁶

In order to encourage others to help this underprivileged group in society, he said:

Whoever looks after an orphan and brings him up until he is an adult will be next to me in heaven.⁷

It was providentially foreordained that this new stage of his life, in which he almost found peace of mind, would not last long.

When he was eight years of age, his grandfather died, and Muhammad (s) experienced more grief. He escorted the dead body of ‘Abd al-Muttalib weeping silently.⁸ The Prophet had thus been endowed with the ability to tolerate a high degree of hardship in order to prepare him for the hardships and sufferings that would occur during his prophetic mission. It was necessary that the Prophet should taste grief and pain from his early childhood so that he could develop a forbearing and patient spirit.

3. Under the care of Abu Talib

‘Abd al-Muttalib embraced the Prophet on his deathbed, crying, and turned to his eldest son Abu Talib, who was to become his father’s successor and the chief of the Hashim clan. Abu Talib was a highly respected man of the Arab tribes. ‘Abd al-Muttalib gave him his final instruction, saying:

Remember, my son, that after me you should take care of and support this only gem who was bereft of his father’s presence and who did not enjoy the affection of his mother. Protect him as your own and keep him away from any harm. I do not know of anyone from among the Arabs like his father who died in the prime of his life, away from his home and without fulfilling his young desires. His mother, who passed away in deep distress, frustration and sorrow, also left him alone. Will you accept my last will?

Abu Talib responded:

Yes father, and I call upon God as a Witness.

He then put his hand over his father’s and made a pledge of allegiance to him to which ‘Abd al-Muttalib replied,

Now it has become easy for me to die.

To bid him a final farewell, he held his grandson close to his chest, smelt and kissed him and breathed his last breath.⁹

Thereafter, the courageous Abu Talib, in order to preserve the veneration of his nephew and to protect him, made every effort possible for more than forty years, until he also breathed his last. He protected Muhammad (s) with bravery, sincerity, and unique self-sacrifice. His wife Fatimah, who was also one of the lionhearted women of the Quraysh, nursed him together with her husband, and out of her motherly affection (which the holy Prophet never forgot), she spared nothing to provide him with more comfort than her own children. His behaviour in the house of Abu Talib attracted everyone's attention and before long he was well-loved by the whole family.¹⁰ Unlike other children of his age who appeared dishevelled with messy hair and dirty eyes, the Prophet always made his hair tidy and kept his face clean. He had the appearance of an adult who lived in comfort. He was not greedy for food in the least. The children sharing food with him, as is the custom of children, ate hurriedly and sometimes snatched morsels from each other, but he contented himself with little food and avoided eating greedily.¹¹ He was magnanimous beyond his years and under all circumstances. Sometimes, as soon as he got up, he would go to the well of Zam Zam and drink a few sips of water from that well. Then, when he was called to have a meal in the morning, he would say that he did not feel hungry and did not want to eat.¹² He never complained of feeling hungry or thirsty during his childhood or adulthood.¹³ Also, Abu Talib always let him sleep beside his own bed. He narrates:

One day, I told him [the Prophet] to take off his clothes and go to bed. I sensed that he did not like my order but as he did not like to refuse, he said, 'Uncle, turn away from me so that I can take off my shirt.' I was very surprised at this. I never heard any lie nor saw any indecent act or laughter from him. He did not like childish games and

enjoyed seclusion and loneliness, and he was always humble.¹⁴

4. Working as a shepherd

Once, while he was living under the care of Halimah, Muhammad (s) asked her, "Where do my brothers go?" Halimah replied that the other men were taking their sheep to the pasture. The Prophet then said, "I will be with them from today onwards."¹⁵ At the age of seven, he was seen carrying clay in the folds of his long shirt to help Abdullah ibn Jud'an in building houses. He was not seen spending a single day in idleness throughout his life. When praying, he always said: "O God, I take refuge in you from idleness, laziness, and abjectness."¹⁶ He encouraged Muslims to work and said:

Worship consists of seventy parts, the best of which is to earn a livelihood through lawful means. The supplication of one who sits at home and who asks God for provision without working is not answered.¹⁷

And:

If any of you carries a pack of firewood on his shoulder, it will be better than to ask someone else who may give it or may not.¹⁸

Perhaps, it was because of this very interest in work and also because he did not like to live among the family of Abu Talib without taking any responsibility and contributing to their means of livelihood, that he started shepherding the sheep of Abu Talib.¹⁹

Furthermore, from his early childhood, the Prophet liked open spaces and vast deserts, and the idea of seclusion had been gaining strength in his mind. It was as if he had been inspired to move away from the confines and hustle and bustle of the city so

that he could reflect on the world of creation insightfully and consider its parts precisely. The power of thought spreads and flourishes well in open spaces, like light waves that do not encounter any obstacles. On the other hand, looking after simple animals, protecting them from the harm of wild animals, and precipices and preventing them from fighting with one another was good experience for the Prophet's future mission. The reason was that he would face ignorant, misguided, and headstrong people and would have to save them from the dangerous situations that they were caught in. Before him, Moses and David had been shepherds for periods of time as well.²⁰ Being a shepherd, therefore, was not a shameful profession.

5. Leading the trade caravan

The Prophet made some trade journeys to Syria and the Yemen. His first journey was made when he accompanied his uncle Abu Talib to Busra, where he learned the techniques of trading. On his last journey, he was hired by Khadijah, whose merchandise he took to Syria and returned with a great profit. He always observed justice and equity while he was trading and avoided telling lies and fraud, which was the practiced by many tradesmen.

Muhammad (s) was never strict in his business dealings with others. Sa'ib ibn al-Sa'ib relates:

During the age of ignorance, I was his [the Prophet's] trade partner, and I found him the best of the partners in every respect. He neither argued with anyone nor was he obstinate and nor did he blame anything on his partner.²¹

He became so well-known for his truthfulness and honesty that everyone who knew him acknowledged his trustworthiness and called him Muhammad *al-Amin* (the trustworthy).²² During the prophetic mission, when the Quraysh rose to oppose him, they nevertheless still entrusted their goods to him. An example of his

trustworthiness can be seen when he migrated to Medina and ordered Ali to stay in Mecca primarily so that he could return the things that people had entrusted to him to their respective owners. He considered truthfulness and trustworthiness to be the basis of life and said:

These two [virtues] have been confirmed and emphasized in all the teachings of the prophets and apply to anyone who is entrusted with a task.

He also said:

Each one of you is a guardian and is responsible for what he is entrusted with.²³

6. Towards the oppressed

During the age of ignorance, there was no legal system or authority that could safeguard the limits of individual rights or to which one could appeal for litigation and adjudication. Excluding those who relied on their own power, influence, or tribal partisanship, the rest of the people were subject to all kinds of transgressions, against life, property, and family. A savage and barbarous temper and the law of the jungle were dominant. In the city of Mecca, the situation was very chaotic. Strangers were especially mistreated. Their belongings were often snatched in public and sometimes, they themselves were taken captive. Of course, among this unbridled multitude, there were a small number of people who had not totally abandoned human virtues, and there were traces of emotion, mercy and chivalry in their hearts. Naturally, they were annoyed at and exhausted with this abnormal situation. One day, an event occurred that significantly moved them, and in response to their dissatisfaction and the injustice they saw, they took some positive steps.

A stranger from the Zubayd tribe came to sell his merchandise in Mecca. ‘Âs ibn Wā’il, one of the chieftains of the Quraysh, acquired the entire amount but paid nothing in return. As a result

of this, Zubayd approached several influential leaders of the Quraysh to no avail. They refused to listen to him. In despair, he went to the top of Mount Abu Qubays and pleaded for justice in a loud voice, saying:

O family of Fahr! [Fahr was the ancestor of the Quraysh, that is, Quraysh himself. He was the man who the entire tribe was related to and was well-known for his chivalry.] I am a stranger in your city and have not yet performed the rituals of *'Umrah* (the lesser pilgrimage). I have been shown no respect and my goods have been unjustly possessed. Where are the brave men who can come to my rescue and safeguard my right?

The sigh of the oppressed man resounded in the air and moved the hearts of the dissatisfied people of Mecca. Muhammad (s), accompanied by his uncle Zubayr ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, rose up and with the help of some of the leaders of the clans of the Quraysh assembled in the house of 'Abdullah ibn Jud'an al-Taymi. Together, they made a pact for the repression of acts of lawlessness and the restoration of justice to the weak and oppressed.

Then all the members of the covenant approached 'Âs ibn Wā'il together. He could not resist the angry people moved by injustice and was forced to yield and to return the merchandise of the man.²⁴ The holy Prophet remembered this event afterwards and said:

I was present when the covenant was made in the house of 'Abdullah ibn Jud'an, and I will not break that covenant under any circumstance. Even right now I am ready to participate in such a pact.²⁵

From Muhammad's (s) point of view, all the members of a society are duty-bound to resist oppressors and should not be content as onlookers. He has also been quoted to have said:

Help your brother whether he is the oppressor or the oppressed one.

When his companions asked him how they should help an oppressor he replied:

By preventing him from oppressing others.²⁶

7. Towards his family

Despite Prophet Muhammad's youthful vigour and vivacity he was never influenced by his urges and desires as a consequence of the virtues of chastity and magnanimity that he possessed. Before his marriage, he was never seen with Khadijah nor was it ever heard or said that he was intimate with women. For instance, even after he migrated to Medina, in his old age, he married several women, but each marriage was based on expediency. If he had intended to seek gratification, he would not have married older women. It was very easy for him to marry beautiful girls to obtain pleasure, but he condemned and cursed those who considered marriage as a means of obtaining pleasure only.²⁷

The Prophet's first wife was Khadijah, daughter of Khuwaylid ibn al-Asadi, who belonged to a well-known family. She herself was regarded to be the First Lady of the Quraysh. She was endowed with chastity and honesty, and for this distinction, she was called al-Tāhirah (the pure one).²⁸ She was one of the wealthiest traders in Mecca. She had turned down several noblemen of the Quraysh who proposed marriage to her, believing that they were after her wealth. The well-known moral virtues of Muhammad (s) the Trustworthy attracted the attention of Khadijah. She found in him the qualities that she had long been searching for and married him. Unlike most marriages prevalent at the time, their marriage did not occur out of love for

position, wealth, beauty, financial and material gain, or for ostentation. Rather, it was a marriage based on moral homogeneity, love of virtue, spiritual union, and mutual affection, giving it permanence. This marital union played an extremely effective and useful role in the propagation of the call of Islam and the encouragement of the messenger of God.

Khadijah, a virtuous and self-sacrificing woman, always shared her husband's pain and comfort and consoled him in the face of hardships. She gave away all her wealth to the needy for the exaltation of the proclamation of *Tawhid* (the Oneness of God). Khadijah was the first woman who converted to Islam and prayed behind her husband. The Blessed Prophet married no other woman as long as she was alive. After her death, he re-married and treated all his wives kindly and justly without giving preference to one over the other. Whenever the Prophet intended to go on a journey, he would draw lots among his wives and would take with him the one to whom the lot fell.²⁹ He was not morally rough but especially kind and tolerant. He tolerated the bad-temperedness and foul language of his wives, even when some of them were so bold as to disclose his private secrets and annoy him by plotting and colluding, to the point where Qur'anic verses were sent down admonishing and reprimanding them.³⁰

After the wars with Banu Naḡir and Banu Qurayzah (the two Jewish tribes), some of his wives fantasized about an aristocratic and luxurious life and demanded jewellery, knowing that the treasures of the Jews were now in possession of the blessed Prophet. The Prophet, who did not want to sacrifice social justice for the whims of his wives and let the public Muslim treasury be used privately, refused to accept their demand and paid no attention to their rough words. Abu Bakr and 'Umar, who were informed of this matter, were determined to punish their respective daughters 'A'ishah and Hafsaḡ, but the blessed Prophet prevented them from doing so.³¹ He just contented himself with keeping away from them. After one month, it was ordered, based on the Qur'anic verses revealed on the occasion,

that he should let his wives choose one of two alternatives: if either of them was still interested in being his wife, she should abandon seeking an increase in wealth, live a simple and contented life, and be hopeful of more reward. However, if either of them preferred the luxuries and glitter of this world, then the Prophet should release her in a fair manner.³²

The blessed Prophet elevated the status of women to the level of full human beings who had the right to independent possession of their lives and property. He always, even in the last moments of his life, recommended getting along with one's wife; that is, observing the exigencies of a woman's primordial nature and exemplified this in the following way:

A woman is like a rib which will break if you try to straighten it. You can benefit from it if it remains as it was made (by Allah).³³

The order of creation and the limits of human primordial nature cannot be changed, and some things that can be done by men cannot be done by women, and within the order of creation each one has his/her own position and talents. The Prophet emphasized that women should be treated kindly and said:

All people have both good and bad qualities and a husband should not just consider the bad qualities of his wife and hate her, because when he is displeased with one bad quality in her, he becomes pleased with that one which is good and these two points should be considered together.³⁴

Prophet Muhammad also cursed those who fail to struggle for the comfort of their family, saying:

One who neglects his family and leaves them alone is deprived of the mercy of God.³⁵

He treated his children kindly explaining that, “Our children are an integral part of us.” He was diligent in rearing his children and taught them the etiquette of Islam. He used to say:

Fatimah is part of me, and she is my heart and soul, and whoever offends her offends me.³⁶

And:

Hasan and Husayn are from me and I am from them.

When the Prophet would go into prostration, Hasan and Husayn would climb on his shoulders and he would either prolong his prostration until they got down, or slowly put them down and rise from prostration. He embraced them and kissed their cheeks and faces. One day, one of the people present with the Prophet saw this and commented, “We never kiss our children.” The Prophet responded:

What can I do for you if God has removed from your hearts the feeling of compassion?

Another day, when he sat Hasan on his knee and kissed the child’s face, Aqra’ ibn Habis said:

I have got ten children, and I have never kissed any of them.

The Prophet looked at him and said:

One who has no compassion for others is not entitled to compassion (from God).³⁷

The Prophet not only caressed his own children but he was also affectionate towards the children of others and embraced and greeted them.³⁸ Furthermore, the blessed Prophet’s love and affection did not stop there. He also embraced his servants. Anas ibn Malik narrates:

I served the Prophet, peace be upon him, in his house day and night for ten years and he never said to me ‘Why did you do that?’ after I had done something or ‘Why did you not do that?’ after I had neglected to do something. He never said a word of contempt to me.³⁹

In short, he treated his family kindly, not strictly or severely and said:

The best of you is he who is the best to his family,
and I am the best among you to my family.⁴⁰

8. Towards the slaves

Slavery is one of the hideous habits of man and is indicative of his cruelty. It has been prevalent since the early history of mankind, gradually becoming a part of the rights of masters and of indisputable social principles. As such it has permeated all human societies to the extent that even the intellectuals and scholars of many nations considered it expedient and right. In these civilizations not only were there no steps taken to abolish it but there were also no steps taken to amend it. The Greek philosophers believed that two types of human beings were created: the free and the slaves, and that the latter were created to serve the former. Aristotle considered the system of slavery to be one of the necessities of human society. He said that with regards to work, when more manpower is needed, the government should use slaves, but attention should be paid to the improvement of their lives.

The blessed Prophet understood with his mature reason and sound conscience that human beings are alike in terms of their primordial nature and natural talents. He knew that they all possess souls, wills, sentiments, and emotions. He also understood that differences in race, colour, language, nationality, and even the privilege of piety and knowledge cannot be the

cause of discrimination against them and their rights. Why do some human individuals enslave others, and deprive them of their freedom and due privileges? The Prophet was well aware that removing a thousand-year-long idea that had penetrated deeply into the minds of both masters and slaves would not be possible, except by changing social modes of thought. If a code was legislated without an executive backing or enforcement guarantee from within the souls of the masters and the slaves, this deep-rooted class system would never be abolished. After all, the masters considered the blatant injustice to be part and parcel of their rights.

The slaves too, by force of habit, had gradually become too weak to exercise their willpower and were not able to act freely. As a result of their total lack of a sense of freedom and free living, they came to believe that their right to live was confined to the very cruel situation in which they were caught. Therefore, the social situation had to be improved in parallel with the gradual social growth. Much thought and wisdom was needed when taking measures to put this into effect.

As an initial step, the Prophet advised the masters and the slaves to regard one another as brothers on a number of occasions. He began convincing them that they were all of the same race and were created from clay.⁴¹ He said:

Whites have no natural privilege over Blacks, and the worst of people in the sight of God are slave traders.⁴² Slaves are your brothers. They have been put under your command and they have their own rights. You should feed them of what you eat and dress them of what you wear. Do not ask them to do things beyond their capacity and help them to do things.⁴³ When you call them, call them politely and do not say, 'My slave' or 'my slave-girl'. Rather, you should say, 'my lad', 'my lass' or 'my boy'. All your men and all your women are

servants of God, and He is the True Master of all.⁴⁴

This expressive and appropriate logic, which emanated from the depths of the heart of a true humanitarian in the form of a heavenly message, played a major role in breaking the arrogance of masters, in obliterating the sense of inferiority from the hearts of the slaves, in the intellectual transformation of many people, and in creating doubt about something that was considered an indisputable principle for centuries. Naturally, it made people reconsider their situations and they gradually came to the conclusion that a brother should not subjugate his fellow brother.

Thereafter, through his practical steps, the blessed Prophet paved the way for the freeing of the slaves, either by encouraging the people to do so and promising them a reward: their sins would be expiated and their repentance would be accepted; or the slaves could be emancipated through redemption (repurchase) so that they would pay their masters a certain amount of money out of their wages by instalments, or that it would be paid from the public Muslim treasury (*Bayt al-Māl*) until they were free.

In this way, the Prophet blocked almost all the roads leading to slavery so that it would gradually die out. He took the lead, demonstrating by practical example, and freed his slave Zayd ibn Hāritha, who his wife Khadijah had presented to him. Furthermore, in order to erase the sense of inferiority and servitude from Zayd's mind, he called him his 'adopted son' in public. As soon as Zayd reached the age of puberty, the Prophet gave his cousin in marriage to him, in order to abolish racial superiority on which the world in those days, especially the world of Arab tribalism, relied heavily. Thus, the Prophet founded the principle of equality.

9. Cleanliness

As previously mentioned, the blessed Prophet was interested in cleanliness from his early childhood and was unique in observing cleanliness of the body and clothes. In addition to observing the manners of *wuḍu* (ablution), he washed and bathed himself on most days and encouraged both of these as acts of worship. He washed his hair which fell to his ear lobes with Lote tree leaves (*sidr*) and combed and rubbed violet oil in it. He perfumed himself with musk and ambergris incense so that his scent could be smelled wherever he passed. He cleaned his teeth with a natural toothbrush (*miswāk*) carefully, several times a day, especially before sleeping and after waking up. His white garment, which reached below his knees, was always clean.

Before and after eating, he used to wash his hands and mouth and would avoid eating bad-smelling herbs and/or vegetables. An ivory comb, a collyrium for the eyes, a container, a pair of scissors, a mirror and a *miswāk* (a natural toothbrush) were always part of his luggage wherever he went. His house was always clean, despite its simplicity and lack of luxury. He emphasised that rubbish should be taken out during the day and should not be left till night. His physical cleanliness was in harmony with his sacred spiritual purity. He advised his companions and followers to keep their heads, bodies, garments, and houses clean and he especially persuaded them to wash and perfume themselves on Fridays so that they would not smell bad while attending the Friday prayer.⁴⁵

He further ordered his followers not to relieve themselves near graves, beside rivers, or in the shade of trees. He emphasised that care should be taken not to pollute water to the extent that even while washing, it was better to wash outside the water rather than entering it.⁴⁶

10. Manners of Social Interaction

The blessed Prophet was cheerful and bright in public but had a sad and meditative expression when he was in private. He never stared at anyone's face and used to look down more often than he raised his head. He was careful to greet everyone first, even the slaves and children. He often used to sit on his knees and would not stretch his legs in the presence of others. Whenever he entered an assembly, he used to sit in the nearest vacant spot and never allowed anyone to stand up for him or make room for him. While being addressed, he did not interrupt the speaker and treated his associate in such a manner that the associate would go away thinking himself to be the dearest person to the Messenger of God. He did not speak unnecessarily. He spoke slowly and clearly and never used bad language. He was a perfect model of modesty and shyness. He never got annoyed at anyone's behaviour but on occasion, annoyance might appear on his face. He never used to complain or object. He frequently visited the sick and participated in funeral processions. He did not allow anyone to speak against anyone else except when pleading for justice.

In one incident, a group of Jews came to the blessed Prophet and said, "as-Sām-u-‘Alaykum" (death be upon you), whereupon the Prophet replied, "Wa ‘alaikum". ‘A'isha understood their meaning and cursed them but the Prophet told her, "'A'isha, do not do that, for God does not like the use of harsh words".⁴⁷

11. Forgiveness

The Prophet always overlooked the maltreatment and disrespect shown towards him. He did not hold a grudge against anyone and never sought to take revenge. His powerful spirit, which transcended passiveness and psychic complexes, preferred forgiveness over revenge. His sensitivity to adversities did not go beyond grief. In the Battle of Uhud, despite the level of cruelty and disrespect carried out on the dead body of Hamzah ibn ‘Abd

al-Muttalib, which hurt the Prophet and saddened him deeply, he did not retaliate against the dead of the Quraysh. Even afterwards, when he gained access to the perpetrators of that cruelty including Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan, he did not seek revenge. In fact, when Abu Qutadah al-Ansari was about to curse them, the Prophet prevented him from doing so.⁴⁸ Another similar incident took place after the victory at Khaybar, when a group of the Jews who had surrendered sent poisonous food to the Prophet. The Prophet was informed of their attempt on his life, but forgave them.⁴⁹ On yet another occasion, he also forgave a Jewish woman who was the perpetrator of a plot to feed him poison.⁵⁰

‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites, who had been granted immunity by acknowledging the *Shahādah* (the Muslim declaration of belief in the oneness of God and the acceptance of Muhammad (s) as his prophet), and who had been nurturing hostility in his heart toward the blessed Prophet, thought that with the emigration of the Prophet to Medina, his governance would come to an end. He was colluding with the hostile Jews and was active in the defamation of the Prophet, provocation of hostility towards him and rumour-mongering about him. It was he who, at the Battle of Bani al-Mustaliq, said:

When we return to Medina, those with honour will drive out those who are dishonourable, that is the emigrants (*muhājirin*).

The companions of the holy Prophet who had a deep-rooted hatred for ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy frequently asked the Prophet to punish him. However, not only did the Prophet not permit them to do so, but he also treated ‘Abdullah with the utmost tolerance. When ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy was sick, the Prophet visited him. He attended his funeral and prayed over his dead body as well.⁵¹

It has also been narrated that a group of hypocrites once plotted to kill the Prophet while he was on his way back from the Battle of Tabuk. They planned to terrify his camel and thereby make him

fall into the valley as he passed along the mountain road. They had covered their faces, but the Prophet identified them. Nevertheless, he did not divulge their names in spite of the insistence of his companions and overlooked their punishment.⁵²

12. The limits of law

The Prophet readily pardoned any mistreatment of his own sacred person, but he did not disregard those who violated the limits of the divine law. When it came to administering justice and punishing the violators of it, he was not lenient at all because the laws of justice safeguard social security and are crucial to the very existence of society. These laws should therefore not be trifled with by whimsical people otherwise society would be sacrificed for the individual. In the year of the conquest of Mecca, a woman belonging to the famous tribe of Makhzūm committed theft and her crime was legally confirmed. Her relatives, who were still under the influence of the pre-Islamic class system, felt that the punishment due for the woman would disgrace them too. They tried to influence the holy Prophet so that the sentence for theft might not be passed. Usāmah ibn Zaid, who was loved by the holy Prophet, was selected to intercede for her so that the punishment might be overlooked by the Prophet. As he was about to attempt to intercede, the Prophet said:

Do you try to intercede for somebody in a case
connected with God's Prescribed Punishments?

Usāmah became aware of his error, apologized, and asked God for forgiveness. Then the Prophet got up and delivered a sermon in which he explained the matter in the following way:

What destroyed the nations preceding you was that
if a noble among them stole, they would forgive
him, and if a poor person among them stole, they
would inflict God's Legal Punishment on him. By
Allah in whose Hands is my life, I will not be

lenient in administering justice to anyone, even if the criminal be my nearest relative.⁵³

Moreover, Muhammad (s) did not exclude himself or consider himself above the law. One day, he went to the mosque and ascended the pulpit from where he addressed the people. During his speech he said:

The Most High God has sworn that He will not overlook any unjust or oppressive acts so in God's name I beseech whoever has suffered an injustice at the hands of Muhammad to rise up and take his revenge, for retribution in this world is more desirable to me than retribution in the next world, in the presence of God's angels and the prophets.

Sawādah ibn Qays then stood up saying:

May my mother and father be sacrificed for you oh Messenger of God. When you were coming from Tā'if, I came to greet you and you were riding upon your she-camel with your stick in hand and when you raised it you struck me in the abdomen. I do not know whether you did it intentionally or unintentionally.

The Prophet replied:

God forbid that I should do such a thing intentionally.

He then ordered for his stick to be brought to him and asked Sawādah to return the strike, like for like. Sawādah rose and approached the Prophet, but when he reached him he began to kiss his body. The Prophet asked him:

Are you taking your revenge or granting your pardon?

Whereupon Sawādah said:

I am granting my pardon.

The Prophet then prayed for him, saying:

May God forgive you too!⁵⁴

Such was the behaviour of this religio-political leader who was providentially bestowed with full power to administer justice and protect the law.

13. Worship

From very early on in life, when he tended sheep at a place called al-Ajyād, the Prophet cherished seclusion and solitude and spent hours contemplating in the retreat of the desert. He was used to spend long hours meditating and speculating on all aspects of creation around him. He had been in a totally different world from that of his tribe and had never attended their entertainment and amusement gatherings. Furthermore, he did not participate in the pagan ceremonies, nor did he contaminate his hands and mouth with the sacrificial meat offered to the idols.⁵⁵ He quickly completed his contemplative journey through the first stage of belief; the Oneness of God (*Tawhid*). That is, he had negated, through reason and contemplation, all but the monotheistic God. He hated the idols and used to say, “I hate nothing more than these idols.”⁵⁶ In order to pass through the second stage of the proclamation of the Oneness of God (*Tawhid*), the stage of affirmation, his God-given lofty spirit and flowing thought soared high above the visible world. Beyond the boundaries of the visible world and in an amazing, yet fleetingly transient phenomenon, he contemplated the Omnipotent and Everlasting Creator. He used to acknowledge this in his heart:

Lo! I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, as one by nature upright, and I am not of the idolaters. (6:79)

From then on, his attachment to seclusion and retreat increased and he found Mount Hirā an appropriate setting for his purpose. He spent most of his time there and every now and again went into retreat and secluded himself for several consecutive nights, with little provision, solely to worship the One God.⁵⁷ Regretfully, his manner of worship while he was in the cave on Mount Hirā has been passed over and therefore silenced in history so very little can be said about it. No one else had access to the retreat and it is not known whether the Prophet knelt down or raised his hands during supplication or if he prostrated himself during the moments he spent in the cave. He might have done all of these. In any case, he had comprehended the reality of worship. In truth, worship has no meaning other than self-negation, attention, resignation (*riḡā*), and submission (*taslim*) to God, the Exalted. After the start of his prophetic mission, the archangel Gabriel taught him the rituals of ablution and prayer as they are laid down in Islamic Law (*Shari‘ah*), and from then on he performed the prayer with the same conditions and essential components as are observed now, including the awareness or presence of heart.

The Prophet used to spend the greater part of each night in prayer, supplication, and communion (*munājāt*) to the extent that his feet were often swollen due to prolonged standing. He considered worship to be a duty of the servant, and he performed it enthusiastically. He did not worship God in the hope of gaining reward or out of fear of punishment. Those who were heedless of his states would say to him sympathetically, “Why do you do this while you are free from all sins?” And he would reply,

Should I not be a thankful servant?⁵⁸

In addition to the month of Ramaḡan and the greater part of Sha‘ban, the Prophet used to fast on every alternate day throughout the rest of the year.⁵⁹ He would retreat in the mosque for the last ten days of the month of Ramaḡan.⁶⁰ On the other hand, he was lenient with regards to others. He would say:

It is sufficient for you to fast three days in every month. Do as many deeds as you are capable of doing. The deed most liked by God is one to which the doer adheres constantly, even if it is small.⁶¹

Although he made the correctness or excellence of some acts of worship conditional, depending on specific spatio-temporal characteristics, he generally had a broad view of the acts of worship and did not restrict worshipping God to a specific place or to certain ceremonies or to the direction of certain individuals. He considered everywhere on earth a *masjid* (a place for prostration), considered all servants able to connect with God without the mediation of anyone, and considered every good deed an act of worship on the condition that the act *per se* was legitimate and imbued with sincere intention. The blessed Prophet made this clear in the early years of his prophetic mission when the order of migration to Medina was issued for the purpose of laying the foundation of Islam by declaring:

He whose migration is to seek the pleasure of God and His Messenger, his migration is to God and His Messenger; but he whose migration is for some worldly thing he might gain, or for a wife he might marry, his migration is to that for which he is migrating.

He based the criterion for judging the correctness of people's acts on the following statement:

Actions are judged according to intentions and everyone will be recompensed according to what he intends.⁶²

Any act, even a daily activity, that emanates from a sincere intention will be considered an act of worship. If a husband puts a morsel of food in his wife's mouth⁶³ or has sexual intercourse

with his wife to guard his chastity and not allow himself to be contaminated with sin, then this is also worship.⁶⁴ Where there is no pure intention, then even prayer and fasting will not be rewarded by God, although they may appear justified.

Muhammad (s) also deemed it necessary to preserve equilibrium between the material and the spiritual life and forbade going to extremes. He condemned isolation from social life, but also condemned giving in to animal lusts to the same degree. He showed the middle way between the two with his words and actions and prevented those who spent all their time in prayer and fasting and who were negligent of the affairs of worldly life from deviation by reminding them:

Your family has a right upon you, your visitor has a right upon you, and your body has a right upon you.⁶⁵

Once, as he was on one of his journeys, some of the companions who were with him were fasting and others were not. Those who were observing fasts fell down on account of weakness. The companions who had not fasted pitched tents and watered the mounts. Seeing this, the Messenger of God said:

The breakers of the fast have received the reward today.⁶⁶

In the stillness of the night, he used to spend long hours keeping vigil and offering night prayer and communion, but when he was leading the congregational prayer he was always careful of others and would say:

When I stand for prayer, I intend to prolong it but on hearing the cries of a child, I cut it short, as I dislike troubling the child's mother.⁶⁷

In another incident, a man was driving two camels used for agricultural purposes when night fell. He found a person by the

name of Mu'ādh praying so he made his camel kneel and joined Mu'ādh in prayer. The latter recited *Surat al-Baqarah* (the Chapter of the Cow) and, due to the length of the surah, the traveling man separated himself from the congregation and performed his prayer on his own. Mu'ādh was informed of this, and remarked that the man was a hypocrite. When the remark was conveyed to the man, he was upset and went to the Messenger of God to inform him of what Mu'ādh had said. Upon hearing what had happened, the Apostle of God became sad and advised Mu'ādh:

You are scaring people away. It would have been better if you had recited the short chapters, for behind you are the weak, the aged, and the people who have business to attend to. In congregational prayer, you should have a regard for the aged and the weak.⁶⁸

The holy Prophet did not like the raising of voice in supplication as is often done by ostentatious people. While journeying, whenever his companions ascended a high place, they would raise their voices with *Takbir* (glorification of God). The Prophet would come close to them and explain:

O people! Don't exert yourselves, for you are not calling on one who is deaf or absent. You are calling the One Who Hears, Who is Near.

And in another version:

...and He is nearer to you than the neck of the beast you ride.

And in yet another version:

...and He is nearer to you than the jugular vein.⁶⁹

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1. *Al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, Ali ibn Burhan al-Din al-Halabi, vol. 1, p. 93
 2. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 95
 3. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 125
 4. *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*, Zaini Dahlan, vol.1, p. 29
 5. *al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, vol. 1, p. 129
 6. *ibid.* vol.1, p. 59
 7. *Sahih al-Muslim*, Abul Husayn Muslim ibn al-Hallaj al-Qushayri al-Nisaburi, vol. 8, p. 222
 8. *al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, vol. 1, p. 134
 9. *I'lam al-wara'*, al-Tabarsi, p. 23
 10. *Ruh al-Islam*, Sayyid Ameer Ali, p. 19
 11. *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*, Zaini Dahlan, vol. 1, p. 80
 12. *Imta' al-Asma'*, Maqrirzi, vol.1, p. 8
 13. *al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, vol.1, p. 111
 14. *Bihar al-Anwar*, Allamah Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, vol. 9
 15. *al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, vol. 1, p. 111 and *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 9, Bab fi Makarim al-akhlaqihi
 16. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Muhammad al-Bukhari, vol. 8, p. 79
 17. *Wasa'il al-Shia'a*, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Hurr al-Amili, Bab al-Tijarah
 18. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, vol. 2, p. 57
 19. *al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, vol. 1, p. 150
 20. *ibid.*, p. 150
 21. *ibid.*, p. 162
 22. *ibid.*, 172
 23. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 4, p. 6
 24. *al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, vol.1, p. 157
 25. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 156 and *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*, Zaini Dahlan, vol. 1, p. 101
 26. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 2, p. 128

27. *al-Islam Ruh al-Madaniyyah*, Shaykh Mustafa al-Ghalayini, p. 182
28. *al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, vol. 1, 163
29. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 4, 34
30. Chapter 66 (al-Tahrim: the Prohibition), 3-5
31. *Sahih al-Muslim*, Abul Husayn Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj Qushayri al-Nisaburi, vol. 4, p. 187
32. Chapter 33 (al-Ahzab: the Allies), 28-29
33. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 7, p. 26
34. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 178
35. *Wasa'il al-Shi'ah*, Bab al-'afw 'an al-Zaujah
36. Nur al-Absar, Muhammad ibn Mu'min al-Shablanji, p. 27
37. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol.7, p. 77
38. *Nur al-Absar*, p. 28
39. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 73
40. *Wasa'i al-Shia'ah*, Bab al-'afw 'an al-Zaujah
41. *Man la-Yahzaruh al-Faqih*, Shaykh al-Saduq Muhammad ibn Babuyah al-Qummi, p. 575
42. *ibid.*, p. 354
43. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 3, p. 149
44. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 7, p. 48
45. The content of this chapter is found in all the books of Sirah and Hadith.
46. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 163
47. *ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 4
48. *Imta' al-Asma'*, Ahmad ibn Ali al-Maqrizi, vol. 1, p. 425
49. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 4, p. 100
50. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 7, p. 14
51. *Imta' al-Asma'*, Ahmad ibn Ali al-Maqrizi, vol. 1, p. 496
52. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 479
53. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 5, p. 152
54. *Bihar al-Anwar*, Bab fi Wafat al-Nabi

55. *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah*, Zaini Dahlan, p. 95
56. *al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, vol. 1, 270
57. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol.1, p. 97
58. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 2, p. 50 and *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 8, p. 141
59. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 2, p. 50
60. *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 48
61. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 3, pp. 161 and 162
62. *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 144
63. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 7, p. 62
64. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 82
65. *ibid.*, 3, p. 163
66. *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 144
67. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, p. 139
68. *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 42
69. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 4, p. 57