

CHARACTER OF THE PROPHET

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The fundamental reason for the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and its beneficial impact on humanity have been explicitly set forth in the Book of God.

"Thus we have sent forth to you a messenger from amongst you, who recites to you Our revelations and purifies you and teaches you the Book and wisdom, and teaches you what you were not wont to know." (2: 151)

And again:

"Truly God was gracious to the believers when He raised up among them a Messenger from themselves, to recite to them His signs and to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the wisdom, though before they were in manifest error." (3:164)

At another place the Quran says:

"He it is who has raised up among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to purify them, and to teach them the Scripture and wisdom. Though they have hitherto been in gross error." (62:2)

The mission of the Prophet assigns an important place to the cultivation of the moral virtues and self-purification. It is a familiar theme running through the whole of Quran which makes it abundantly clear that wisdom stands for exalted morality. In the Surah Isra the Quran expounds the bases of morality and civilized behaviour and goes on to call them as wisdom.

That is of the wisdom thy Lord has revealed to thee." (17:39)

Again, before descending to the particular of Prophet Luqman's moral teaching the Quran alludes to them as wisdom vouchsafed to him.

"Indeed, We gave Luqman wisdom: Give thanks unto Allah. Whosoever giveth thanks, he giveth thanks only for his own soul's good, and whosoever is ungrateful Surely Allah is Absolute, Owner of Praise." (31: 12)

The Prophet was a perfect model of good morals. The Quran expresses this fact thus:

"Surely thou art upon a mighty morality." (68:2)

Once, when Ayesha was asked about the morals of the prophet, she replied: "If you want to know of his morals, see the Quran."

The wisdom of perfection of morals and purification of the self attained by the earlier Muslims was the result of training and guidance and personal example set by the Prophet before his companions. A whole generation was raised, in the company of the Prophet, which was most virtuous, possessed of the best morality, abhorred to avoid self-delusion and wiles of the Devil. The Quran bears witness to the perseverance, reformative zeal and moral strength of these men when it says:

"And know that the Messenger of God is among you. If he obeyed you in much of the affairs, you would suffer; but God has endeared to you belief, decking it fair in your heart, and He has made detestable to you unbelief and ungodliness and disobedience. Those they are the right - minded, by God's favour and blessing: God is All knowing, All-wise." (49 :7-8)

The Prophet also confirmed it when he said:

The changing political, social and economic conditions became an impediment in correct application of the educative norms and values of the ahadith. "The best of men are my contemporaries."

An eminent companion of the Prophet has described the distinguishing features of his comrades in a pithy sentence:

'Truehearted, profound in knowledge and absolutely unassuming."

Those were the men produced by Islam through prophetic care and guidance; it was a miracle that could have been worked only by Prophet.

A Perennial Workshop of Humanity

The personal guidance provided by the holy Prophet came to an end with his departure from this fleeting world, but the Quran, ahadith and the glowing examples of the Prophet's life continued to show the right path. Way to purification of the self contained in the wisdom of prophetic teachings was a sure cure to all the ailments of the heart, self-conciet and the ruses -of satan.

The changing political, social and economic conditions became an impediment in correct application of the educative norms and values of the ahadith. Other science religious and secular, helpful in advancing the people to again worldly positions and posts of authority overshadowed the study of hadith and the curriculum followed in educational institutions came to be limited to scholastic discussions of religion and theoretical treatment of purely historic of religion and theoretical treatment of purely historic or intellectual issues or those pertaining to historicity of past events and the biographical details of the Prophet's life.

But, despite these deviations, the hadith and biography of the Prophet still continue, of course next to the Quran, as the most potent means of acquaintance with the norms of

ethics, purification of self. cleaning of heart and virtuous behaviour.

The matter contained in the books of ahadith is of two types. One of it pertains to affairs, practicable and tangible, such as, the postures of the prayer, recitation of the Quran orisons and invocations. preaching of religion. behaviour in War and peace and similar other practices and injunctions. The second category expounds those inner states and conditions which are the end result of the practices described in the former group. We can call these resulting dispositions and temperaments as sincerity and self-certicism. steadfastness. abstinence and self-sufficiency, courtesy and modesty. awe of God. humility and broken-heartedness while entreating God, preference and self-sufficiency. courtesy and modesty. awe of God. humility. and broken heartedness while entreating God, preference of hereafter over the world. anxiety to win the pleasure of God. moderation, dislike of excess in every matter, kindness to all and clemency to the poor and weak, wholesomeness of disposition and manners, benevolence and munificence. patience, courage. hatred and love for the sake of God. nobility and humanity. forgiveness. returning the good for the evil and several other similar moral virtues which cannot be understood easily for one would find it hart to comprehend them without a living example of sublime behaviour illustrating them in a practical manner.

We are accordingly giving here a description of the tender susceptibilities of the Holy prophet handed down to us by eye witnesses. who were nearest to him, knew all about his public and private life and had a penetrating insight into human behaviour and psychology. Thereafter we shall make a mention of the character and morals of the Prophet. ",

Distinguishing Features of the Prophet's Personality:

We shall cite here only two witnesses. One of these is Hind b. Abi Hala (the son of Khadija and maternal uncle of Hasan and Husain) and the other is Ali b. Talib Hind b. Abi hala is on record that:

“Being care-laden with the anxiety of after-life, the Prophet would remain engrossed in the thought of hereafter continually for long spells and seemed to be endlessly perturbed by it. Often he would remain silent for long and never spoke needlessly. when he spoke, he enunciated each syllable distinctly and thus he would also end his speech. Whatever he said, it was always explicit and in plain terms. His speech was never long- winded nor unnecessarily concise. He was kind-hearted, soft spoken, never harsh or cool in his behaviour. Neither he humiliated anyone nor himself liked to be treated with disrespect. The prophet set much by every provision; even if it was small in quantity, he never deprecated it. As for the edibles, he 'showed anger about anything of the world or what it contains. However, whenever one failed to meet one's obligation to God, nothing could cool his indignation until he had paid back in full measure. But, for the wrongs done to his own person, he would never become angry nor he retaliated.”

When he pointed out something, he did so with his whole hand; and when he was astonished he turned his hands over. In speaking with another man, he would strike the

palm of the left on the thumb of his right hand. Angry, he would avert his face; joyful would look downwards. His laughter was but a smile, and when he laughed, his teeth used to appear white as hailstones." Prophet; had the opportunity of knowing all about him and also possessed the gift of describing a thing or character in its vividness and intensity. He says about the Prophet:

"He was pre-disposed to refrain from unseemly language, curses or reviling and deeds shameful; in no wise he did or said anything improper; nor returned evil for evil; rather he was given to forgive and forget. Never in his life he raised his hands against anyone save in a fight for the sake of God, nor did he strike anybody with his hands, neither a servant nor a woman. I never saw him exacting retribution for any offence or excess save when the honour of God was involved or the limit set by him was transgressed, for, in that case the Prophet was more enraged than anybody else. If he had to choose between two alternative courses, he chose the easier one. When he came to his house, he behaved the easier one. When he came to his house, he behaved like a commoner; washed his garments, milked the sheep and performed the house

"The Messenger of God was not given to idle talk, he spoke only when he was concerned and comforted the people instead of giving them a scare through his speech. If a man of rank or nobility called upon his speech. If a man of rank or nobility called upon him from another tribe, he showed him due honour and appointed him to some respectable post. He was as cautious in his dealings with the people as he was over-careful in forming an estimate about them but he never denied anyone his courtesy and sweet temper. He always kept himself posted with the affairs of his companions and used to ask them about their welfare.

He talked of what was good and commended it, deprecated the vile and discouraged it; was always moderate but steadfast without any wavering; never allowed anything to escape his attention lest others should become negligent or get distracted; took care to possess the means for every contingency; and was never found wanting in doing what was right and proper, but in no wise did he exceed the limits. Those who kept his company were all virtuous and the elect; one was best in his estimation who was the most benignant and was one who excelled others in benevolence and kindness and did favour to others. The Prophet would stand up with the name he went, he sat down in the rear and instructed others to do the same. He paid such an attention to everyone in his company that everybody thought that none attracted his attention more than him. If anybody asked him to sit down or spoke of his affair, the Prophet listened to him patiently and gave heed to him until he had finished his talk and departed. If anybody asked for something or wanted disposing of his business or at least comforted him with words kind and sweet. Such was his grace and kindness to one and all that everybody took him as his father. In regard to what was right and proper he regarded all on the same plane. His were the gatherings of knowledge and edification, of seemliness and modesty, of earnestness and probability. Neither anyone talked in a loud voice, nor ensured others, nor cast a reflection on anybody, nor found fault with others; all were equal on an even ground, and only those enjoyed a privilege who were more pious and

God-fearing. The elders in his company were held in reverence, the youngers were treated kindly, those in need were given preference by and the wayfarers and strangers were afforded protection and looked after." all and the wayfarers and strangers were afforded protection and looked after."

He further says:

"Of cheerful disposition, the Messenger of God was always bright and radiant; he was tenderhearted and sweettempered; not stern by nature; nor spoke harshly; nor was accustomed to speaking loudly; nor to say anything unseemly or lewd; nor yet was he wont to find fault with others. He was not stingy, nor miser; if he disliked the request made to him he simply the request outright. From three things he always kept aloof: One was squabble, the other arrogance, and the third dabbling in a futile task. And, the three things he spared others were that he never spoke ill of anybody, nor maligned anyone, nor pried into the failings of others. He gave tongue only to the things that were virtuous. When he spoke, all those present listened to him attentively lowering their heads as if birds were sitting on their heads. Others spoke only when the Prophet had finished his talk, nobody joined issue with thing others kept quite until he had finished his talk. Everybody was given and equal opportunity to express himself. The Prophet of God would smile on the remarks which made others laugh; he expressed surprise over things which astonished others. He always gave need to the wayfarers and used to 'put up patiently with the rudeness of the strangers until his companions diverted the attention of such persons to themselves. He used to say, Help those whom you find in need. He gave ears only to such tributes as were modestly worded and never interrupted others or cut into their talk. If anybody exceeded his limits, he either forbade him or got up to cut short such prattle.

He was the most generous, large-hearted, truthful, clement, lenient and amiable. One who saw him for the first time was overawed; but when he kept his company and came to know him intimately, he became attached to him like an inseparable companion. Those who had seen him say that they had never seen a man like him either before or after him - May God have peace and blessing on His Apostle."

Natural Disposition

The Prophet came of the noblest stock, yet he was very modest, exceedingly large-hearted and most sweet -tempered; he never kept aloof from his companions; cherished a kind and tender disposition towards children and often took them in his lap; accepted the invitation to take meals with slaves and maidservants, the poor and the indigent; visited the sick even if he had to go to the farthest corner of the city and always accepted the excuse offered for a misdeed." The Prophet was never seen stretching his legs whilst sitting with his companions lest anyone of them should feel inconvenience. His companions recited or listened poems, described some incident of the pagan past while the Prophet either sat silently or smiled with them at some amusing remark. The Prophet was extremely kindhearted and affectionate the finest human sentiments and

virtues were discernible in his demeanour. Often he asked his daughter Fatima, "Send for my both sons (Hasan and Husain)." When the two came running, the Prophet used to kiss and embrace them. Once he happened to have in his lap one of his grandsons who was at the last gasp. His eyes started overflowing. S'ad asked, "What is this, O Messenger of God?" This is compassion," replied the Prophet, 'planted in the hearts of such servants of God whom He wills. Verily, God has mercy upon those who are compassionate."

When Abbas the uncle of the Prophet was shackled with other prisoners taken in the battle of Badr, the Prophet could not sleep because of the groaning of Abbas. The Ansar, on coming to know the Prophet's uneasiness, united him and offered to release him without demanding any indemnity. The Prophet, however, did not agree to the suggestion.

The Prophet was extremely kind to the Muslims. He was so tolerant that he overlooked their occasional weariness and boredom. He set his sermons and discourses at intervals lest the people got tired. If he heard a baby crying while he was leading a prayer, he invariably shortened it and said, "I stand up for prayers and want to recite a longer surah, but when I here a baby crying I cut the prayer short short so that his mother may not feel uneasy."

The Prophet used to say, "None of you should speak ill of others in my presence since I desire to meet all of you with a clean heart." Benign and gracious to all the Muslims like their father, the Prophet used to say, "The property left by the deceased belongs to his heirs, but the debt left by him is my responsibility." Moderation and temperance were his innate dispositions. Ayesha relates that the God's Messenger was never given a choice between two courses when he preferred the easier one provided it involved no sin; for if it did involve a sin, no one kept farther away from it than he. He used to say, "God likes to see the marks of His bounty on His servants."

The Prophet occupied himself in his house like a common man. As Ayesha relates he used to wash his clothes, milch the goat and himself do the odd jobs like mending his garments and repairing his shoes. When asked how the Prophet occupied himself within his house, she replied, 'He used to keep himself busy in household chores but went out to offer the prayers when the time arrived.'" She also says, "The Prophet was very softhearted, the kindest of all. He laughed often and smiled much. Anas relates that he had not seen a man who was more kind and nice to his household members than the Messenger of God. It is related on the authority of" Ayesha that the Prophet said, "The best amongst you is he who is most nice to his wife and children and I am the nicest among you." Abu Huraira reports that the Prophet never expressed displeasure of any food (served to him); he ate it if he desired otherwise left it alone.

Anas reports, "I served the Prophet of God for ten years but he never blamed me for doing or not doing anything, nor he ever asked me why I had done or not done something." The companions of the Prophet never stood up as a mark of respect to him

since he disliked the practice. He used to tell them, "Do not exalt me as the Christians have exalted Jesus, son of Mary. I am just His servant, so call me God's~ servant and messenger." Anas states that any slave-girl or maidservant of Medina could hold the Prophet by his hand and say whatever she liked or talk him to the place she desired. When Adiy b. Hatim came to see the Messenger of God, he invited him to come within his house. A maidservant brought a cushion to rest upon but the Prophet placed it in-between him and Adiy, and sat down on the floor. Adiy later said that this made him understand that the Prophet was not a king. Once a man was overawed in his presence. The prophet reassured him, saying, "Take heart, I am not a king but the son of a Quraishite women who used to eat dried meat." The Prophet used to sweep the floor of his house, eat with the maidservant, knead the dough and make purchases.

If he came to know of a thing about someone not liked by him, he never asked why had he done it. He would rather refer to it in an indirect way by saying what has happened to the people that they do or utter such things. He made the man conscious of desisting from the unseemly act without referring to him by name.

The Compassion of the Prophet encompassed even the dumb creatures. He always asked his followers to be kind and compassionate to them. He is reported to have said, "God has commanded you to show kindness to everyone, so if you have to kill (an animal) kill it nicely. If anyone of you has to slaughter (an animal), he should sharpen the blade first and also give it rest." The Prophet is also reported to have said, "Fear God in the matter of these dumb creatures. If you ride them, ride when *they* are healthy; and if you eat them, eat when *they* are in a good condition." The Prophet enjoined everyone to be kind and considerate to his servant or slave or the hired labour. "Feed them with the food you eat," said the Prophet, 'clothe them with the clothes you wear and do not be hard to the creatures of God." The Prophet is further stated to have said, "Those whom God has made your dependents, are your brothers, servants and helpmates. Anybody whose brother has been made subservient to him, out to feed him with the food he eats and cloth him with the clothes he wears; demand nothing that is beyond his power, but if it becomes necessary to get such a task executed then he should help him in doing the job."

Once a nomad come to the Prophet and asked, "How many times should I pardon my servant in a day?" "Seventy times," replied the Messenger of God. The Prophet also instructed his followers thus; "Pay the wages of a labour before his sweat dries up.