



The Last and Final Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

Allah, Most High, himself bears eloquent testimony to the supreme status of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the following verses of the Holy Qur'an testify:

Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the prophets. And Allah is ever Knower of all things (33:40).

Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Latter day, and remembers Allah much (33:21).

O Prophet, surely We have sent thee as a witness, and a bearer of good news and a warner, and as an inviter to Allah by His permission, and as a light-giving sun (33:45-46).

And surely thou hast sublime morals (68:4).

He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of Truth that He may make it prevail over all religions (48:28).

The former Scriptures also prophesised his glorious advent and are suffused with glowing descriptions of his personality so much so that in the ancient Hindu Books, his coming is described as that of God walking upon earth.

Non-Muslim writers, some of whom are even hostile to Islam, pay tribute to this unique personality. One quotation will suffice:

"An idea is a spark falling upon straw...(quoting Dumas). Thus was it with Muhammad. God was the spark, the vital spark of spiritual flame, and this humble but honest Arab trader was the straw that after twenty years of silent but tenacious smouldering, God had set a light to" (Bosworth Smith, Muhammad and Muhammadanism, p. 344).

As Muslims, we all know that the Holy Prophet was the best of all creation and the most successful of all religious personalities in the history of the world. How can we get an insight into the mind of the Holy Prophet and the qualities that made him a living success for all times? We have to bear in mind that he combined in himself to the highest degree all the virtues of the preceding Prophets. Furthermore, his superiority lies in the fact that he has to face every circumstance of life and every temperament that it is possible to encounter.

I have tried to put myself in the place of a non-believer who has never heard of the Holy Prophet and also in the place of one who, because of upbringing and culture, has formed a negative stereotype of

our Holy Prophet and I have tried to imagine what would make such a person understand the secret of his success and attract him to the religion of Islam.

A non-Muslim is apt to question the credentials of the Holy Prophet on three main areas:

- His motivation
- His consistency
- The relevance of his message to the present time

The first question that a non-believer may ask is this: What was the mainspring of the Prophet's life force? To this we can say with all truth and sincerity that it was his deep faith in God, his love for the Almighty and his selfless concern for the regeneration of mankind that kept him labouring a mighty labouring from the beginning of his life till the end.

As regards his strong faith in God, Maulana Muhammad Ali says:

"He had a deep conviction that God had a plan for the uplift of man, to bring into perfection not one nation or one people, but the whole world, and that no power could frustrate the Divine purpose (Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad, p. 40).

And:

"He was threatened with murder, and even Abu Talib, his uncle and his sole support, told him that he could no more withstand the united opposition of the Quraish. 'Do not charge me,' he said to the Prophet, 'with a responsibility too heavy for me.' But the Prophet stood adamant. He said: 'Should they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, in order to make me renounce this mission, I should not do it. I shall never give it up until it shall please Allah to make it triumph or I perish in the attempt.' Failing in the attempt to persuade Abu Talib to hand over the Prophet to them, the Quraish now tried to win him over by temptation. They approached him directly: 'If your ambition is to possess wealth, we will amass for you as much of it as you wish; if you aspire to win honour, we are prepared to swear allegiance to you as our overlord and king; if you have a fancy for beauty, we offer you the hand of the finest maiden of your own choice.' The temptations were nigh irresistible. From a destitute, helpless and persecuted man to a mighty potentate rolling in wealth and with beauty by his side was a big life. But he replied: 'I want neither riches nor political power. I have been commissioned by Allah as a warner to mankind, and I deliver His message to you. Should you accept it, you shall have felicity in this life as well as in the life to come; should you reject the word of Allah, surely Allah will decide between you and me'." (ibid. p. 41).

He recounts an incident in the life of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) which exemplifies his unshakeable faith in God:

"On a certain journey, while resting under a tree all alone, an enemy came upon him, and unsheathing his sword, shouted: 'Who can save thee now from my hands?' Calmly, the Holy Prophet replied: 'Allah.' And the next moment the same sword was in the Holy Prophet's hand and he put the same

question, on which he (the enemy) assumed a tone of abject humility, and the Prophet let him go" (ibid. p. 38).

But what was the reason for this unswerving faith? The answer is this: He knew that his message was not a concoction of his mind nor was he speaking out of his own desire, but instead, it was a revelation from God, Most High, and as such there was no power that could deter him from his task.

As regards his love for God, nothing in the history of man can approach this poignant prayer of his when rejected by the people of Taif, pelted and bloodied, he turned to his Beloved as he retreated in sorrow and agony:

"O my God! To Thee I complain of the feebleness of my strength and of my lack of resourcefulness and of my insignificance in the eyes of people. Thou art the most merciful of the merciful, Thou art the Lord of the weak. To whom wilt Thou entrust me, to an unsympathetic foe who would sullenly frown at me, or to a close friend to whom Thou hast given control over my affair? Not in the least do I care for anything except that I may have Thy protection. In the light of Thy face do I seek shelter, in the light which illumines the heaven and dispels all sorts of darkness, and which controls all affairs in this world as well as in the Hereafter. May it never be that I should incur Thy wrath or that Thou shouldst be displeased with me. There is no strength, nor power, but in Thee" (ibid. pp. 6-7).

In fact, every action of his was activated by his love for and devotion to God. He was never sluggish nor too tired to turn to Him in prayer and he would do so even to the point where his feet would swell as he stood long and deep in salat (prayer). The recitation of the Holy Qur'an by someone else would immediately bring tears to his eyes, so deep was his love for God, His Word and, of course, His creation.

The Holy Qur'an tells us:

And We have not sent thee but as a mercy to (all) the nations (21:107).

It is true that Allah had charged him with nothing but the clear deliverance of the message, but his heart pined for the upliftment of his people who were sunk into the torpor of moral, intellectual and spiritual decadence and the Holy Qur'an itself bears testimony to this overriding concern of the Holy Prophet:

Then maybe thou wilt kill thyself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they believe not in this announcement (18:6).

And:

Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into error, most solicitous for you, to the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful (9:128).

Therefore, in his daily life, his love made no distinction, no differentiation as regards race, religion, class or gender.

Among his Companions could be counted people of many races and all were able to achieve high rank, socially and spiritually. In fact, there was no limit to anyone, neither was there a superior or inferior race. All were equal in the eyes of God and in his eyes, too.

Although he made no compromise when he preached against the false beliefs of other religions, yet in his dealings with individual members of these religions he was careful not to hurt their sensitivity. He once reproved Abu Bakr for telling a Jew that he, the Prophet, was superior to Prophet Moses (as) even though the Jew had started the argument and even though he himself knew that he was superior to all the Prophets, for he did not want to hurt the Jew's feelings.

He came as a mercy to all the nations and all the social classes, but he was extremely solicitous of the poor and downtrodden who had nothing to fall back on to raise their self-esteem. And to the most downtrodden of these classes belonged the slaves. He urged good treatment and encouraged the freedom of slaves. "If a person owning a slave sets him free, God will in recompense save every part of his body, corresponding to every part of the slave's body, from the torment of Hell," he exhorted. Furthermore, he made provisions (for example, from the zakat fund of the state), for their education and emancipation.

And we all know that no man ever did as much to raise the position of women from that of degradation to one of dignity and honour in the home and the society at large. From being themselves considered property, he conferred on them the right of inheritance and gave them equal right with men and equal opportunity for all-round advancement. Furthermore, the treatment of his wife was made the touchstone of a person's worth and nobility in the eyes of God and man, and his life abounded with examples of the most perfect treatment he meted out to his wives.

The second big question is: Was he consistent in his teaching and practice?

Firstly, the Holy Prophet hated hypocrisy. "The hypocrites are in the deepest depths of the Fire," he warned, and admonished: O you who believe, why say you that which you do not? It is most hateful in the sight of Allah that you say that which you do not do (61:2-3).

Instead, he exhorted mankind to be sincere in obedience to God and so whatever commands he received from Allah, he imparted to the people but above all, he himself put them into practice, openly and secretly. "His life was the Qur'an," his wife, Lady Ayesha testified, and who can know more of a man than a wife or a valet? And, of course, his servants all bore witness to the beauty of his character and temperament. Anas (rta) recalled how he worked as a servant to the Holy Prophet for ten years and although he was young and apt to make mistakes, never once, he said, was the Holy Prophet harsh to him. And those who restrain anger and pardon men (3:133) was a guiding principle in his dealings with every class of mankind.

If he preached truthfulness, he himself steadfastly adhered to it. Even before he became a Prophet, he was known in Makkah by all and sundry as Al Amin, the Trustworthy, the True. It is interesting to note that later on in his life, when he claimed prophethood and preached against their idols, his opponents

called him all kinds of names – magician, sorcerer, enchanter, madman, poet, and showered all kinds of abuse and vituperation on him, but never once did they refer to him as a liar!

If he preached forgiveness, he practised it to a fault, and never in his life did he avenge a personal insult or injury. Instead, on record is the greatest act of forgiveness in the annals of man when he conquered Makkah and told his erstwhile enemies, as they lay at his mercy: "This day there is no reproof on you." It was on this occasion, too, that he displayed a supreme act of humility when he rode into Makkah as the head of a conquering army not with head raised high and chest pushed forward, but with head bent low over the saddle.

If he preached that mankind was a single race, he practised it to the hilt, and furthermore, left, as the sole criterion for judging the excellence and worth of a person's character, his taqwa (piety). Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful. Surely Allah is Knower, Aware (49:13). He himself never discriminated against anyone on any grounds whatever and in his farewell address he underlined the equality of the human race: "All of you are equal. All men, whatever nation or tribe they belong to, and whatever station in life they may hold, are equal."

If he taught religious tolerance, he practised it to its limit, as the example of the Najran Delegation amply demonstrates. Not only was the discussion held in the Prophet's Masjid (Mosque) in the most amicable atmosphere, but he also allowed them to hold their prayer service right in the Masjid even though they had requested permission to pray elsewhere.

Whilst it is true that he fought wars against his enemies, yet these were forced upon him and his small band of followers by the enemy who wanted to extirpate every trace of Islam and Muslim from Arabia. He bore persecution for thirteen years in Makkah without lifting a finger in self-defence or retaliation and it was only when he had to flee to Madinah and was pursued there was permission given by God to fight, but only in defence. And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors (2:190). He followed this command to the letter so much so that never in his battles did he strike the first blow.

If he preached patience in adversity, he was the foremost in the practice of it and the circumstances of his life bear ample testimony to this. He was orphaned at an early age, suffered persecution in his native city and was later forced to flee with a price on his head; he lost near and dear relatives and friends and eleven children including Ibrahim, his only son whom he dearly loved, yet he never complained either to God or to man and never did he allow those sorrows to affect him in his relationship with others or in his task of reclaiming mankind – no bitterness, no resentment, no grievance – instead, a cheerful countenance and kindness to all.

As regards the dealing of justice to all regardless of whether it was family, friend or foe, the Holy Prophet stands head and shoulders above all other luminaries the world has known. It was this quality – the ability to give redress to even the most abject of society – that endeared Islam to the hearts of millions in the past, present and, I venture to say, will do so in the future also. This is what he preached: O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allah, even though it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives – whether he be rich or poor, Allah has a better right

over them both. So follow not your own desires, lest you deviate. And if you distort or turn away from (the truth), surely Allah is Aware of what you do (4:135).

One example from hundreds will suffice to exemplify the point:

"He was called Al Amin and no one, even his bitterest enemy, ever accused him of breaking his word. These are the injunctions he gave: The believers are those who are keepers of their trusts and their covenant (23:8) and They fulfil the promise (5:1)" Maulana Muhammad Ali's Translation of the Holy Qur'an, note 620, p. 220).

When the Emperor of Rome questioned Abu Sufyan, the Quraish chief and an implacable foe of the Holy Prophet, whether the Prophet had ever broken a promise, he had no choice but to confess that the Holy Prophet had never done so. And so it was with the treaties he made with the enemy tribes. These treaties he considered as sacred documents, something the "civilised modern nations" of today can do well to consider and imitate, especially in light of what obtains in international relations, for these verses point to the heart of an insidious present-day problem: And fulfil the covenant of Allah... and break not the oaths after making them fast.... You make your oaths to be means of deceit between you because one nation is more numerous than another is.... And make not your oaths a means of deceit between you... (16: 91, 92, 94).

Secondly, his consistency was evident not only in his faithfulness to what he preached but also in the many vicissitudes of his existence here on earth. Let a non-Muslim speak:

"On the whole, the wonder is to me not how much, but how little under different circumstances, Muhammad differed from himself. In the shepherd of the desert, in the Syrian trader, in the solitary of Mount Hira, in the reformer in the minority of one, in the equal of the Persian Chosroes and the Greek Heraclius, we can still trace a substantial unity. I doubt whether any other man, whose external conditions changed so much, ever himself changed less to meet them; the accidents are changed, the essence seems to be the same in all.

Power, as the saying is, no doubt put man to the test. It brought new temptations and therefore new failures, from which the shepherd of the desert might have remained free. But happy is the man who, living 'in the fierce light that beats upon a throne, and blackens every blot' can stand the test as well as did Muhammad" (Bosworth Smith, Mohammed and Mohammadanism, pp. 140-141).

And finally, the sceptic may ask: can his teachings be applied to today's world and all its complexities? Let us remember that circumstances may change but human nature does not and whatever the criteria for success in the fifth century A.D., or the first century, they still hold good now and for all times. Also, let us not forget that those same principles built not only a strong individual, a strong community, a strong nation, but also a famous empire, the like of which never existed before or after, and the like of which has been promised during the last thousand years of this Adamic Dispensation. He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of Truth that He may make it prevail over all the religions. And Allah is enough for a witness (48:28).

To substantiate this point, let us examine just two quotations from two unbiased non-Muslim personalities of high stature in the Western world.

"It is not the propagation but the permanency of his religion that deserves our wonder, the same pure and perfect impression which he engraved at Makkah and Madinah is preserved, after the revolutions of twelve centuries by the Indian, the African and the Turkish proselytes of the Koran...and his living precepts have restrained the gratitude of his disciples within the bounds of reason and religion" (E. Gibbon and S. Ockley, History of the Saracen Empire, p. 54).

"I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to possess that assimilating capability to the changing phases of existence which can make itself appeal to every age....

I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today.... I have studied him (i.e. Muhammad), the wonderful man, and in my opinion, far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the saviour of humanity. I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world he would bring it the much-needed peace and happiness. Europe is beginning to be enamoured of the creed of Muhammad. In the next century, it may go still further in recognising the utility of that creed in solving its problems, and it is in this sense that you must understand my prediction" (George Bernard Shaw, A Collection of Writings of Some of the Eminent Scholars, published by the Woking Muslim Mission, 1935 edition, p. 77).

Simple, humble, selfless and consistent in love for God and man and service to all, this "denizen of the desert" left no material inheritance but two things which he himself said will keep us safe and elevate us if we obey them – the Holy Qur'an and his Sunnah.

Certainly We have revealed to you a Book which will give you eminence. Do you not then understand? (21:10)

Say: If you love Allah follow me: Allah will love you, and grant you protection from your sins. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful (3:30).

May Allah bless us all