

Moral Conduct of the Noble Prophet (s): Part 1

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Abstract

The Prophet Muhammad (s) is admired by God as possessing a great character. He (s) embodies all the moral virtues of other prophets that captivate those who seek truth to follow him. The Prophet Muhammad (s) was born when and where the human community was facing a great moral disaster. His moral virtues concerning divine ethics, personal ethics, family ethics, and social ethics have provided the ground for a significant historical development in human community. In this part of paper, virtues related to God such as faith, love, worship, contentment, submission, trust in God, and gratitude will be discussed and then personal virtues like good-temperedness, patience, humbleness, modesty will be considered.

Keywords: *the Prophet Muhammad, faith, love, patience, humbleness, modesty.*

Introduction

By examining the life of divinely appointed guides, the best of whom being the Prophet of Islam (s), all people, across time and space, can acquire the road map for spiritual growth. The present study examines the moral life of the noble Prophet of Islam (s), through specific examples, in order to ascertain the godly and personal aspects of an ideal life.

Muhammad (s) was born to Bani Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe, a famous and noble family in Mecca. At that time, idol-worshipping, ignorance, superstition, murder, pillage, bigotry, and arrogance challenged the morality and culture of Hijaz. Significantly, God, the Kind, chose His last messenger from among this same community, with the mission to save humanity from corruption and destruction, and to correct harmful social situations so that people could return to the path of morality, happiness and humanity.

The following story provides an introduction to the character of the Prophet (s):

A man asked Imam Ali (a) to mention some of the moral virtues of the noble Prophet (s). He (a) replied, “You mention the blessings of God, so that I mention the moral virtues of his excellency.”

The man asked, “How can a person mention the blessings of God when He says in the Qur’an, ‘If you enumerate Allah’s blessings, you will not be able to count them.’ [16:18]”

Imam Ali (a) answered, “God considers all the blessings in this world little in the verse ‘The enjoyment of this world is little’ [4:77] and has considered the character of the Prophet (s) great in the

verse ‘and indeed you possess a great character’ [68:4]. You cannot count what is little; how could I count that which is great? But it should be enough for you to know that the good character of all the prophets (a) are perfected in the Prophet (s). Each one of the prophets (a) was a manifestation of a noble character, while the Prophet (s) has them all, for which he (s) said, ‘Indeed I was chosen to complete the noble moral traits.’” (Zamani 1989, 2:69)

With Imam Ali (a)'s description in mind, this article takes a brief look at the vast ocean of the Prophet’s (s) character, with a focus on the godly and personal aspects. If our lives are harmonized with the moral and spiritual teachings of the Prophet (s) in the aforementioned aspects, we will live a valuable and happy life. Servitude to God, an important duty of every Muslim, can be achieved by observing these Prophetic teachings.

1. Moral Conduct in Relation to God

These teachings include those moral characteristics that are related to the servant’s relationship with God Almighty. These moral characteristics can be obtained through virtuous, moral conduct. This section introduces some of moral characteristics and virtues of the noble Prophet (s) in this regard.

Faith

When it comes to one’s moral conduct in relation with God, faith is the most important moral virtue. From the viewpoint of monotheistic morality, faith is the core of human salvation and the path to eternal happiness. Without it, good actions will bear little fruit and will not lead to eternal happiness. In the glorious Qur’an, righteous acts almost

always accompany faith. This frequent association indicates that this link is important for the achievement of perfection and happiness.

The noble Prophet's (s) character consisted of faith and belief in the origin and the destination. From it, his other great moral virtues, his "great character" according to the holy Qur'an, sprang. Where he (s) invited his close relatives to Islam, it was this virtue of faith and belief in his mission that gave him strength. When he (s) publicized his invitation to Islam, he was able to resist all difficulties and hardships by relying on his faith. He (a) had a complete faith that God was always with him and assisted him. He (a) describes this highest level of faith in the following manner: "The best of faith is that you know that God is surly with you wherever you are" (Payandeh 2003, 229). He (a) himself had a true faith in this companionship and assistance. Against the grand offers of the Quraysh tribe, he (a) said, "Even if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand, I would never abandon this word [i.e., my mission] until either He makes me victorious or I perish therein." (Hakimi 2001, 2:364).

Love

Love is rooted in faith. The Qur'an states that believers have the highest levels of love for God: "But the faithful have a more ardent love for Allah" (2:165). When he (a) was asked to define faith, the Prophet (s) answered, "Faith is when God and His Prophet (s) are dearer to you than anything else" (Ghazali n.d., 27:42). The Prophet (s) always asked God, "O God! Bestow upon me Your love and the love of those who love You and the love of whatever draws me close to Your love" (Fayd Kashani 1997, 7:286).

Once, an Arab man asked the noble Prophet (s), "O Prophet of God! When is the Day of Judgment?" The Prophet (s) asked him, "What have

you prepared for it?" The man answered, "I have not prepared a lot except that I love God and His messenger (s)." The Prophet (s) answered, "A man is with whom he loves [on that day]" (Bukhari n.d., 112).

Worship

It was the Prophet's (s) faith and love that drew him toward the servitude and worship of God. During the *Mi'raj* (Ascension), the Prophet (s) was addressed, "Ask for whatever blessings you want." The Prophet (s) said, "Relate me to Yourself as [Your] servant." Then, the blessed verse "Immaculate is He who carried His servant" (17:1) was revealed to him (Sabziwari 1993, 277).

One of the most beautiful spiritual states of the Prophet (s) was revealed at the time of prayer. Some of the wives of the Prophet (s) reported, "While we were speaking with the Prophet (s) and the time of prayer came, it was as if he (a) did not know us and we did not know him" (Majlisi n.d., 81:258).

The peak of the Prophet's (a) honor and joy was his nearness to God, as manifested in this statement: "I have times with God that no close angel, prophet or servant whose heart God has tested with faith would bear [let alone anyone else]" (Majlisi n.d., 81:360).

Contentment and Submission

Worshipping God means submitting to Him and being content with what He decrees. During the *Mi'raj*, the noble Prophet (s) asked, "O God! What action is more valuable?" God, the Glorious, answered, "Nothing is more valuable before Me than trusting Me and being content with My will. O Muhammad! I obliged My love toward My

friends, My friendship toward those who show an act of love in My way, My love toward those who have connected themselves with Me, and My favor upon those who trust Me. My love has no end” (Daylami 1412 AH, 1:199).

Trust in God

One who is submitted to the will and commands of God leaves all his affairs to Him. God considers trust among the best of actions (Daylami 1412 AH, 1:199), and the noble Prophet (s) said, “Surely, Gabriel reminded me that never a living thing dies unless it receives all its daily sustenance in full” (Harrani 1404 AH, 40). In addition, the Prophet (s) also said, “If you trust God as He deserves, you will receive your daily sustenance, like the birds that are hungry in the morning and satiated at night” (Payandeh 2003, 643).

Gratitude

The Prophet (s) recited the Qur’an and cried so much that he (a) fell unconscious. He (a) was asked, “Has God not forgiven your past and future sins?” He (a) answered, “Yes, but should I not be a grateful servant?” (Daylami 1412 AH, 1:91).

Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, “The Prophet (s) was so that when something happened to him that made him happy, he (a) would say, ‘Praise be to God for this blessing,’ and when something happened to him that made him sad, he (a) would say, ‘Praise is to God in all conditions’” (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:97). The Prophet (s) would say, “God would not open the door of gratitude to a servant and then close the door of increase in blessings to him” (Ibid., 2:94).

Fear and Repentance

Fearing one's sins and having hope in divine forgiveness always lead a believer to invocation and repentance. One of the virtues of the noble Prophet (s) was his fear of God and invocation and repentance before Him. Imam al-Sadiq (a) said, "The Prophet (s) did not like anything in this world more than being hungry and fearful" (Kulayni 1407 AH, 8:163). This fear of God always moved him into a state of constant invocation and repentance. According to Imam al-Sadiq (a), when the Prophet (s) got up from any gathering, even an unimportant one, he (a) repented to God Almighty, twenty-five times (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:504). The Prophet (s) said, "A curtain of darkness covers my heart, and I repent seventy times every day" (Majlisi n.d., 60:183).

2. Personal Ethics

Good-temperedness

God praised His Prophet (s) for his great character. He himself (s) kept insisting on good-temperedness. Among his sayings in this regard are the following: "On the Day of Judgment, they would not put anything heavier than good-temperedness on the scale [of a believer's records]" (Hurr al-'Amili 1409 AH, 12:152); "O Children of 'Abd al-Muttalib! You would not be able to satisfy all the people with your wealth, so encounter them with an open face and good-temperedness" (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:103); and "The closest of you to me on the Day of Judgment is the most good-tempered one among you" (Hurr al-'Amili 1409 AH, 12:153).

Patience and Perseverance

The Prophet's (s) patience during difficulties is praiseworthy. Take for example his patience in the face of the polytheists' insults, abuses, and

harassments. When in the battle of Uhud, they broke his teeth and wounded his forehead. This was unbearable for many of the Companions, and some of them ask the Prophet (s) to curse them. But the Prophet (s) told them, "I am not chosen to curse people. I am chosen to invite them toward God and be the mercy for them. O God! Guide my people, for they do not understand" (Qummi 1414 AH, 2:681).

During the difficult hunger that the early Muslims went through in Shi'b Abi Talib, the Prophet's (s) patience inspired his companions and enabled them to resist. Even his enemies were moved by his tolerance, many of whom were guided to Islam because of it.

One day, when the Prophet (s) was going to the mosque for prayer, a Jewish man stood in his way and claimed that the Prophet (s) owed him some money. The Prophet (s) told him, "I do not owe you anything, but let me go home and bring you some money." The man replied, "I will not let you move one step forward unless you pay me back." The Muslims, who were waiting for the Prophet (s) at the mosque, came to look for him and found him with the Jewish man. The Jewish man was holding the Prophet's (s) cloak and was pulling it such that the Prophet's (a) neck was bruised. They decided to punish him, but the Prophet (s) stopped them, saying, "Leave him alone! I know how to deal with this friend of mine." Then, the Prophet (s) spoke to him gently and with so much patience, such that the Jewish man said *shahadatayn* and became Muslim just there. The Jewish man said, "No normal human can have so much patience and tolerance. Surely, you are sent by God, and you are a prophet. Such patience only belongs to prophets." (Delshad Tehrani 2004, 2:504).

Contentment and Simple Life

Contentment and simple life were important and fundamental principles in the lives of all prophets (a). Even Prophet Solomon (a), who had humans and jinns under his command, lived a simple life with contentment (Daylami 1412 AH, 1:157). The Prophets' (a) contentment made their eyes and hearts rich, and even little from this world would suffice them.

For example, the Prophet's (s) life depended on little money (Daylami 1412 AH, 1:115). In regards to the importance of having simple life and being content, he (s) said, "Good is the one who turns to Islam and has a life that is enough for him" (Hakimi 2001, 4:371). He (s) considered "anyone who has a healthy body, secure environment, and enough daily sustenance," as having "the entire world." (Ibid., 372) He similarly refers to contentment as "an eternal kingdom" (Ibid., 375).

Imam Ali (a) described the Prophet (a) as the perfect example of simple living: "Certainly, in the Prophet of Allah (s) was sufficient example for you and a proof concerning the vices of the world, its defects, the multitude of its disgraces, and its evils, because its sides had been constrained for him, while its flanks had been spread for others; he was deprived of its milk and turned away from its adornments" (Nahj al-balaghah, 226).

Someone asked Imam al-Sadiq (a) about the veracity of a hadith narrated from his honorable father (a), according to which "the Prophet (s) never ate wheat bread to be full." The Imam (a) replied, "No! The Prophet (s) never ate wheat bread and never ate barley bread to be full" (Tabataba'i 1999, 1:160).

One of the companions of the Prophet (s) reports: “Having received prior permission, I went to the Prophet (s) and I met him in the room (of his wife Umm Ibrahim). I saw him sleeping on a very simple mat where a part of his body was on the ground and a part of it on the mat. Under his head, there was a pillow made of palm fibers. I greeted him and sat beside him. I said, ‘O Prophet (s), you are chosen by God among all the creatures. Caesar of Rome and Khosrow of Iran lie on gold-woven and silk carpets, but you [lie on such a mat], although you are higher than them,’ The Prophet (s) answered, ‘They have rushed to the pleasure and enjoyments in this world, while it is transitory, and its gains will be gone. However, our pleasurable life is postponed for the hereafter, and I have chosen the eternal abode of the hereafter’ (Ishaqi 2006, 86).

Humbleness

The Prophet (s) was the best example of humbleness. He (s) associated with servants of God of any rank and position based on the Qur’anic instruction “and lower your wing to the faithful who follow you” (26:215). ‘Abd Allah b. Mas’ud narrates that once a man came to the Prophet (s) and trembled in awe of the Prophet (s). The Prophet (s) told him, “Be calm! I am not a king. I am indeed the child of a woman who ate simple, rough food.” (Tabrisi 1412 AH, 16).

In another narration, a disreputable woman saw the Prophet (s) sitting on the ground and eating like servants. She said, “O Muhammad (s)! By God, you are sitting on the ground and eating like servants!” He (s) answered, “Woe is to you! Who is more of a servant than I am?” (Qummi 2007, 51).

Modesty

The people of God are examples of virtue, and the Prophet (s), was thus adorned with modesty. Imam al-Sadiq (a) describes the Prophet (s)'s modesty: "When the Prophet (s) sat with a person, he (s) would not take out his clothes while that person was still there" ('Ayyashi 1380 AH, 1:203).

The Prophet (s) always smiled; he (s) never used abusive language against anyone. If someone used abusive language, he (s) would not say, "Why did *he* say such a bad word?" Instead, he (s) would say, "Why do people say bad words?" without mentioning the name of that person, so that the person's reputation would remain unharmed.

About his modesty, it is reported that he (s) never stared at anyone's face. If he (s) ever had to criticize someone, he (s) would say it in an indirect way (Delshad Tehrani 2004, 33).

Tidiness and Hygiene

Tidiness, graceful appearance, and observing hygiene were very important in the Prophet's (s) manner. He (s) said, "God Almighty, abhors uncleanness and untidiness" (Payandeh 2003, 304). The Prophet (s) would "look in the mirror and comb his hair." In addition to "grooming himself for his family," he (s) also "groomed himself for his brothers, saying, 'God likes His servant to go to his brothers groomed and tidy'" (Hurr al-'Amili 1409 AH, 5:11).

The Prophet (s) valued good smell and always used perfume. In the dark of night, people felt his presence by his perfume and said, "It is the Prophet (s) [coming]" (Tabataba'i 1999, 1:399). One of the companions of the Prophet (s) describes the Prophet's (s) smell: "Whenever he (s)

shook hands with someone, the good smell remained on the person's hand until the next day. Whenever he (s) caressed the head of a child, that child was then recognized by others with that good smell" (Qummi 2007, 61).

The Prophet (s) cared so much about brushing his teeth that he (s) said, "If it did not make a difficulty for my people, I would order them to brush their teeth for all prayers" (Kulayni 1407 AH, 3:22).

Orderliness

The Prophet (s) was the best example of orderliness. A great holy order prevailed upon all his manners, and he (s) emphasized having order in life. He (s) said, "It is upon the wise to dedicate during the day ... a time to pray to their Lord, a time to reckon their actions, a time to reflect upon the acts of God Almighty upon themselves, and a time to benefit from the permissible" (Hakimi 2001, 1:90).

Eating and Drinking

Friends of God are always free from being a slave of food. The Prophet (s) did not depend on certain foods and, "he (s) ate any kind of food" (Hurr al-'Amili 1409 AH, 25:34). He (s) recommended hand-washing before and after eating, saying, "Anyone who wishes that the blessings increase in his house should wash his hands prior to sitting at the table. And anyone who washes his hands before eating will live healthily, and God will extend his daily sustenance" (Majlisi n.d., 63:352).

Conclusion

There are a wide range of moral virtues which are reflected by the Prophet Muhammad's (s) life. He was an excellent reliable exemplar for

anyone who wants to lead a moral life. His good moral traits were deeply rooted in his faith in God. To be a good servant, he showed the highest degree of faith in God and love for Him. He was content with what God has given to him. He entrusted his affairs to God while he was constantly grateful to Him. To name a few examples, he treated people with respect, he exercised patience in pursuing the aims set up by God for him, and he was completely organized.

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