

Muhammad ﷺ: The Ideal Prophet
A Historical, Practical, Perfect Model for Humanity
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Chapter One

Prophets – The Perfect Models for Humanity

This is a magical world brimming with wonders, diverse and remarkable. One finds here myriads of beings and creatures with distinct characteristics. If one were to cast a glance over different objects, one would find that sensibility and consciousness go on increasing gradually from inorganic matter to human beings. The smallest particle of the universal kingdom known as ether or atom has no sense perception and consciousness but a faint trace of life appears in the minerals. In the vegetable kingdom sensitiveness of an involuntary nature is discernible in the form of germination and growth while a still higher type of sensibility accompanied by a limited consciousness can be seen in the animal life. Then, in man, the sense perception reaches its perfection with the appearance of volition and consciousness. The inorganic matter is, accordingly, free from every kind of responsibility; vegetables respond to the law of life and death; animals are liable to a bit higher responsiveness; while man has to shoulder the responsibility of everything done by him. In the case of man, too, this responsibility varies according to his sensibility, consciousness and will: the children, the adults, the foolish, the learned, the wise, all are accountable for their actions in proportion to the lack or abundance of these powers.

Now, let us examine this question from another angle. Nature takes upon herself the responsibility to sustain creatures to the extent they lack sensibility, consciousness and volition; she goes on shifting her responsibility to each in proportion to these potentialities developed by it. Who rears the diamonds and rubies in the bosom of mountains and who feeds the fish in the oceans? Who brings up the wild animals? Who provides nourishment to the fowls in the air and who attends to their ailments and illness? Why do the animals of the same species living in mountains and jungles, under different climatic conditions, develop different characteristics? Why are the dogs of Europe different in appearance from those in Africa? Why does nature provide them with different types of paws and furs and skins according to different physical and climatic conditions?

These differences indicate the ways in which nature helps every being in such manner as it lacks will and consciousness and withdraws its care to the extent each develops the capabilities to maintain itself. Man has to earn his own living. He has to cultivate and grow foodstuff for meeting his needs. He has also not been provided with the coat of short and fine soft hair as some of the animals do have for protecting themselves against the rigors of climate. Likewise, he has himself to cure his illness and heal his wounds. On the other hand, nature undertakes the responsibility of protecting other creations, to the extent they lack will and perception, against their enemies. She arms them with different coats of mail: to some are given claws and canine teeth, horn to others; some are taught to fly, or to swim, or to run; while others fend off their enemies by biting or stinging. But, look at the man. The poor fellow has neither the tusks of the elephant, nor the claws of the lion, nor even the horns or pointed teeth or stings and poison glands. He has been

created weak and defenseless but the great weapons of sense perception, consciousness and volition at his command more than make up for his deficiencies and enable him to subdue powerful elephants and ferocious lions. He can catch poisonous snakes, birds flying in the air and fishes living in high waters. He can contrive a variety of arms and armaments for his defense.

To whichever philosophy or religion you may subscribe, you would nonetheless agree that man is held responsible for his actions by virtue of possessing the senses and consciousness and intellect as well as will and determination. The responsibility devolving on man is known, in the phraseology of Islâm, as *takleef-i-shar'ee* or religious obligation, which is laid on every man according to his competence depending on his strength. The guiding principle as laid down by Allâh in this regard is –

Allâh tasketh not a soul beyond its scope.

[2:286]

This is the burden on man which has been alluded to in the Qur'ân as *amanat* or divine trust – a trust which was first offered to the minerals within the earth and the lofty mountains and the heavens higher up in the skies, but none had the courage to shoulder this onerous responsibility.

Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it. Lo! he hath proved a tyrant and a fool.

[33:72]

The burdensome trust undertaken by man has been pithily expressed by a poet (Hafiz of Shiraz) who says:

“The heavens shrank to bear the burden of Trust,
To my lot it fell as the dice was cast.”

Tyranny signifies, in its ultimate analysis, a behavior exceeding one's limits, the tyrants are more often foolish enthusiasts. Likewise, ignorance is nothing but excesses of intellect. The antithesis of tyranny is justice and moderation and that of ignorance, knowledge and understanding. And since man is by nature inclined towards extravagance, he requires knowledge and constraint to enlighten his path. This is why the Qur'ân speaks of these two, knowledge and moderation, as faith and righteousness.

By the declining day, Lo! Man is in a state of loss, Save those who believe and do good works, And exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance.

[103:1-3]

The 'loss' spoken of in this verse is excesses or ignorance, which is restrained by faith and good deeds. Allâh cites 'the declining day' or the time as a witness to man's loss because the past of mankind bears a testimony to his excesses. For the great majority of people have always been a pawn in the game of a few enthusiasts and over-ambitious persons, Thomas Carlyle has aptly remarked that 'the history of the world is but the biography of great men.' History of the world tends to show that the peoples and nations have ever been exploited by their compatriots save when they have not been deprived of faith and righteousness. This has invariably been the cause of decline and extinction of every nation.

Read the scripture of any religion or the homilies teaching moral lessons and you would see that the same drama of conflict between knowledge and ignorance, between tyranny and justice has been enacted in different ways. You would find faith and righteousness

arrayed against the forces of darkness and ignorance, tyranny and disbelief. It is always the story of those upholding higher human virtues locked in battle against the wicked and the iniquitous. What are, after all, the great epics like the *Iliad* of the Greeks, the *Parallel Lives* of the Romans, the *Shâhnâma* of the Iranians and the *Râmâyana* and *Mahâbhârata* of the Hindus? Every nation has had similar events in its life or that of the founder of an era who had enkindled and kept alive the heroism and the urge of the people to fight the evil. These epics speak of these great events so as to teach every nation that it should give up the ways of wickedness and take to the path of virtue and goodness. What do the major portion of the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospels and the Qur'ân consist of? They tell us the stories of downfall of the wicked and disbelieving people spreading corruption on the earth, and of the rise of virtuous and pious in their place, so that we may take lessons from them and become virtuous, just and Allâh-fearing. This is why all the prophets and saints of yore were sent by Allâh, they taught the ways of virtuous living to the 'nations of old; and then came the last of them, as a mercy for the whole mankind, so that his life may serve as a beacon of light and guidance for mankind to the end of time. This is what the Qur'ân declares in these words through the Prophet of Islâm:

I dwelt among you a whole lifetime before it (came to me). Have you then no sense.

[20:17]

The revelation from Allâh sets forth, in this verse, the life of the holy Prophet as an intrinsic evidence of his prophethood.

History has, however, preserved the life-stories of men, thousands in number, who had achieved eminence in one field or the other. All of them have left their imprints on the pages of history. There are amongst them emperors surrounded by the splendor of royal courts, an array of military commanders and generals, philosophers lost in their thoughts, mighty conquerors intoxicated with power, poets singing to cheer their own solitude with sweet songs and the affluent rolling in riches. All of them have an attraction of their own for the sons of Adam. Whether it be Hannibal of Carthage, or Alexander of Macedonia, or Caesar of Rome, or Darius of Iran, or yet Napoleon of France, the life of each has a fascination for the posterity. Similarly alluring are the lives of all philosophers from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Diogenes of the ancients to Spencer of England. Even the lives of Nimrod and Pharaoh, Abû Jahl and Abû Lahab and Korah depict yet another trait of human nature and character; but the question is, who, amongst these, can be deemed as a model of goodness and virtue fit to be followed by other human beings? Great generals and conquerors, indeed, were they, who swept everything before them by their sword, but did they also succeed in leaving an ennobling example of their lives to be followed by others? They had won brilliant victories, but were they able to cut the shackles of superstition and credulous beliefs? Did they solve any social problem besetting equality and brotherhood of human beings? Did they succeed in restoring our moral and spiritual health and happiness or in eradicating the faults and failings of our desires? Did they present any model of moral rectitude and decorous behavior for the posterity?

World has given birth to great poets. But, these were painters of fantasy, merely starry-eyed utopians unfit to be assigned any place in the *Republic* of Plato. They have solved no problem of man, since Homer to this day, save feeding the fire of human emotions and helping man's imagination to run riot with their visions and dreams. No practical model of righteous action could they ever produce with their musical thoughts and rhythmical creations. How correctly the Qur'ân brings in its verdict on the poets:

As for the poets, the erring follow them. Hast thou not seen how they stray in every valley, And how they say that which they do not? Save those who believe and do good work.

[26:224-227]

The Qur'ân also tells us why the exquisite expressions of the verse-makers have been of little use to humanity. They run after every idea aimlessly without any set purpose; more often sinking to the depth of human folly rather than soaring in the height of divine light. The poetry emanating from minds steeped in faith can, sometimes, be effective and enlightening and a restorer of truth and justice. History of the world, however, bears ample proof of the unprofitableness of the poets. There have been sages and philosophers who have plumbed the secrets of nature beyond the limits of perception and changed the concept of things and materials. They have, nevertheless, failed to produce any blueprint for the practical guidance of humanity. For their flight of imagination lacked practical wisdom, they could never provide man with any guidance in the discharge of his obligations. Aristotle was the precursor of ethical philosophy now studied in every university. His brilliant exposition of ethical impulses is esteemed highly both by the learned and the learners, but how many of them have been able to betake the path of virtue by reading his dissertations? Teachers well-versed in ethical philosophy can be found almost in every institution of higher learning, who know all about its premises and principles, but has their impact been ever felt beyond their class-rooms? On the contrary, we find that very often their conduct and behavior are no better than those of the man on the street. To walk in the right path one has not to hear the sermons but to see the living examples of cardinal virtues.

Powerful kings and emperors have also appeared on the stage of this world. They have extended their dominions, played with the life and property of their fellow beings, extracted wealth through taxes and tithes from some and bestowed their bounties on others. They have demeaned one to exalt the other. The Book of Allâh presents, in the words of the Queen of Sheba, this rare picture of their doings on the earth:

Lo! kings, when they enter a township, ruin it and make the honor of its people shame.

[27:34]

The swords of mighty kings have hanged over the heads of criminals in thoroughfares and market places, but they have failed to reach the guilt concealed in the minds and hearts of men. They have enforced law and order in the habitations and townships, but the kingdom of spirit has ever been beyond their reach, or, rather, their own courts and castles have been the breeding dens of moral confusion and spiritual anarchy. What else have the kings like Alexanders and Caesars left for us? How many lawgivers has the world seen from Solon to this day? Their laws were not only short-lived but have also failed to cleanse the hearts and purify the morals. Subsequent rulers always placed a new set of laws on the statute book, albeit more often to further their own interests than to enforce the rules of equity. The world has not changed even today. Still, the legislatures in every country make and unmake laws endlessly, but seldom their labors are for the benefit of the people whom they profess to represent. It is more the interest of the powers that be which they seek to promote.

These are, broadly, the higher sections of society which could be expected to work for the welfare of humanity. If you give further thought to the matter you would see that whatever light of goodness and virtue you find in the world today, it owes its existence to the pure-hearted souls whom you know by the name of prophets and messengers of

Allâh. Wherever you come across compassion and justice and a sincere desire to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the downtrodden, no matter whether these are found in the cave of a mountain or a dense forest or a populous city, they are due to the call given by one of these men of Allâh. The Qur'ân tells us:

There is not a nation but a warner hath passed among them.

[35:24]

For every folk a guide.

[13:7]

The lustre of their teachings is to be found today in every country and nation; the savages of Africa and the civilized nations of Europe are both equally indebted to them for edification of their souls. Of all the groups of men we have mentioned afore, the most august are they, for they rule not over the bodies of men like the kings, but their authority is enshrined in the hearts of the people. Their kingdom is not of lands and countries, but of hearts and spirits: they do not wield the sword, yet they obliterate the stains of guilt and iniquity at one stroke; they are not dreamy-eyed songsmiths, yet the sweetness of their speech delights the soul; they are neither senators nor law-makers, yet the laws given by them regulate the conduct of statesmen and judges, kings and subjects from age to age. This is not a question of faith or conviction but a matter of fact and history. One has to see whether it has actually been so or not. The edicts of Patliputra's Ashoka are engraved on the pillars of stones, but those of the Buddha are inscribed in the hearts of people. The decrees of the rulers of Ujjain, Hastinapur, Delhi and Kannauj are no more to be found today, but the *Dharma Shâstra* of Manu still prevails. The statutes of Hamurabbi, the King of Babel, have long been buried under the dust, but Abraham's (عليه السلام) teachings are still alive! Pharaoh's imprudent demand to pay divine honors to him was as transient as the clouds, but Moses (عليه السلام) still lives in his teachings. How long did the laws of Solon remain in force, but the laws of Torah are still the measure of justice! The Roman Law which nailed Jesus Christ (عليه السلام) to the Cross became extinct long ago, but the doctrines of love that flowed from the lips of Jesus (عليه السلام) still redeem the wrongdoers and wash them of their sins. The Abû-Jahls of Mecca, the Chosroes of Iran and the Caesars of Rome are all dead and gone, but the Lord of Madînah (ﷺ) still rules over the hearts of people in every part of the world.

If these facts are correct, one would have to concede, not on grounds of faith, but through reason and logic of stubborn facts, that no other class of people except the prophets has worked for the welfare and happiness of mankind in its truest sense; theirs was the endeavor consisting of virtue and goodness, purity of heart, moderation and temperance. They all came to this world as messengers of Allâh to preach the gospel of Truth and Faith, and they left their footsteps of righteousness to be followed by the coming generations. It is from their teachings alone that the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor and the learned and the illiterate can derive equal benefit.

That is Our argument. We gave it unto Abraham against the folk. We raise unto degrees of wisdom whom We will. Lo! thy Lord is Wise, Aware. And We bestowed upon him Ishâq (Isaac) and Ya'qûb (Jacob); each of them We guided; and Nûh (Noah) did We guide aforetime; and of his seed [We guided] Dâwûd (David) and Sulaymân (Solomon) and Ayyûb (Job) and Yûsuf (Joseph) and Mûsa (Moses) and Hârûn (Aaron). Thus do we reward the good. And Zakariyyâ (Zachariah) and Yahyâ (John) and 'Îsâ (Jesus) and Ilyâs (Elias). Each one (of them) was of the righteous. And Ismâ'il (Ishmael) and al-Yasa' (Elisha) and Yûnus (Jonah) and Lût (Lot). Each one (of them) did We prefer above

(Our) creatures, With some of their forefathers and their off-spring and their brethren; and We chose them and guided them unto a straight path. Such is the guidance of Allâh wherewith He guideth whom He will of His bondmen. But if they had set up (for worship) aught beside Him, (all) that they did would have been vain. Those are they unto whom We gave the Scripture and command and prophethood. But if these disbelieve therein, then indeed We shall entrust it to a people who will not be disbelievers therein. Those are they whom Allâh guideth, so follow their guidance.

[6:84-91]

These luminous verses of the Qur'ân speak of a particular group among men, some of whom have been mentioned by name, who had been sent to cure the spiritual ailments of mankind and restore its moral health. They were men, holy and angelic in spirit, who preached the word of Allâh in different times and climes and in every land. Whatever of moral rectitude and righteousness, purity and chastity man possesses today, it is all their legacy, and in following their footsteps alone lies the salvation and well-being of humanity.

The prophets adorn and illuminate the soul of man: the zealous preachings of Noah, the unshakable principle of Allâh's oneness upheld by Abraham, the patrimony of resignation to Divine will bequeathed by Isaac, the self-sacrifice of Ishmael, the indefatigable efforts of Moses, the faithfulness of Aaron, the self-resignation of Jacob, the lamentations of David, the wisdom of Solomon, the litanies of Zachariah, the chastity of John, the piety of Jesus, the penitence of Jonah, the strenuous exertion of Lot and the endurance of Job have made the life of man winsome and bright. To these consecrated souls can be traced every virtue and goodness found in the world today – (عليهم السلام - peace be upon them all).

There is, however, no denying the fact that culture and civilization, progress and improvement, in short, everything that has contributed towards welfare and material progress of mankind and helped man to raise himself to the level of vicegerent of Allâh on earth, has been brought about by the combined effort of all men. Astronomers have discovered the movements of heavenly bodies, chemists have found out the properties of substances, physicians have searched the medicines for curing diseases, architects have developed the science and designs of structures and artisans have given birth to useful crafts and fine arts, and all of them have thus a share in the making of our world. We ought to be thankful to all of them. Nevertheless, we are even more obliged to offer our thanks to those who have decorated the world within us. They are the physicians who have cured us of our greed and envy, diagnosed the ailments of our souls and refurbished its lost energy and vigor. They elaborated our behavior patterns and aptitudes, ideas and intentions and showed us the way of attaining purity of heart and sublimity of spirit. It was through the efforts of these Allâh-moved souls that the cultural attainments were refined and embellished, the link between man and Allâh, the slave and the Lord, was established. How could the world have attained its excellence if we had been denied the knowledge received through prophetic teachings? We are, verily, indebted more to these men of Allâh than to any other class or group of persons. This is the compliment due to the prophets of Allâh and it ought to be paid by all of us whenever their name comes on the lips of anyone. And, this is the benediction taught by Islâm to be offered for them: 'O Allâh! Have mercy and peace on all of them.'

For nothing in this fleeting world is eternal, these impeccable guides of humanity had also to make their exit from this fleeting world and go to their everlasting home after they

had completed the task for which they had been sent by Allâh. The subsequent generations have thus to preserve the records of their lives, sayings and doings. In fact, the documented portraits of the masters of old and the records of their achievements going by the name of history and biography are the only means for conserving the arts and sciences, discoveries and ideas of the earlier generations. We have undoubtedly some lesson in every past experience and, for that reason, the purification of our spirits and morals depends on following in the footsteps of these exalted teachers of morality and their pure-hearted followers. People have hitherto drawn inspiration from their sublime examples and shall continue to do so in future also. We are therefore, duty-bound, more than anything else, to preserve the accounts and endeavors of the prophets for our own guidance and betterment.

But, no philosophy, no education and no teaching, howsoever elevated and exalted, can inspire the people unless its preacher or teacher has a loving personality capable of commanding the affection and reverence of his followers. Recently, when I was returning home in February, 1924, after a brief visit to Hijaz and Egypt, I happened to enjoy the company of the celebrated poet, Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, who was coming back from America by the same ship. A fellow passenger asked Tagore: "How is it that Brahmo Samaj has not succeeded in its mission although its creed was exceedingly fair, it enjoined reverence to all religions and their founders; and its fundamental principles, being exceedingly logical and satisfying, were formulated in the light of modern science and philosophy?" The poet-philosopher reached the core of the matter when he replied: "It could not fare well because it had no personality behind it to set up a practical example and attract and inspire the people." Truly, no religion can succeed without the shining example of a gifted teacher.

We, thus, need men of Allâh, pure-hearted and impeccable, who are specimen of human perfection, for our guidance and salvation. May Allâh bless them all.

Chapter Two

Muhammad ﷺ – The Ideal Prophet

Man needs the light of his past experiences to brighten his present and future. And, as I told you earlier, all the different segments of humanity which have done anything to make this world a better place to live in deserve our gratitude; but, the most deserving of our gratitude are the prophets of Allâh. Each one of them has, in his own time, presented a winsome example of his sublime conduct and moral behavior. If one was a model of endurance, others were embodiments of selflessness, sacrifice, fervor for Truth and Oneness of God, submission to the Will of the Lord, chastity and piety. In short, each of them was a lighthouse of guidance showing the path of exalted behavior in one or the other walk of life every man has to tread in his sojourn on the earth. Man, however, stood in need of another guide who could illuminate the entire gamut of human behavior, in all its diversity, by his comprehensive example of goodness and virtue. Man, in other words, needed a perfect and universal exemplar who could place in his hands a guide-book of practical life, so that every wayfarer may reach his destination safely. And, this exemplar did come to the world in the person of the last of the prophets, Muhammad, ﷺ – on whom be peace and blessings of the Lord.

The Qur'ân announced this gospel truth in these words:

O Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner. And as a summoner unto Allâh by His permission, and, as a lamp that giveth light.

[33:45-46]

He is the prophet well-informed, the witness to Allâh's commandments, the bringer of glad tidings, the warner unto those who are heedless, the summoner of the erring to the way of Allâh, the resplendent light which dispels the darkness and shows the right path.

Every prophet of Allâh came to this world as a witness, or a harbinger of good tidings, or as a warner, or as a summoner, but never in the past there came a prophet who combined all these qualities. There were witnesses to Allâh's majesty and overlordship, like Jacob, Isaac and Ishmael (عليهم السلام). Others like Abraham and Jesus (عليهم السلام) were the heralds of glad tidings. There were also warners like Noah, Moses, Hûd and Shu'yeb (عليهم السلام) – the main point of their warnings was terrible punishment awaiting the evil-doers. Then, there were the prophets like Joseph and Jonah (عليهم السلام) whose teachings set the tone for those who summon to divine guidance. But the messenger *par excellence* who had all these marks of prophethood – a witness as well as a welcomer, a warner as well as a caller, and who was a distinguished Apostle in every respect was none else other than Muhammad (ﷺ). He was sent to the world as the last Prophet, the final one, after whom no other messenger was to be sent again by Allâh. This is the reason why he was granted a *shari'ah* or the law that was perfect and final, requiring no revision in the days to come.

For the teachings of the last Prophet were to be ever abiding, to remain unchanged to the end of time, he was sent as an acme of perfection with ever-flourishing guidance and resplendent light. This is an indisputable fact attested by history.

A character held out as an ideal or model for humanity's needs must fulfill certain conditions before such a claim can be universally accepted. The first and foremost test to which the character of such a guide should be put is historicity.

Historicity means that the genuineness of the accounts of life and character of any man put forth as a perfect exemplar should proceed not from any fable or a legendary tale, but

from reputed sources and methodical records of what we call as history. Man is never disposed, by his frame of mind, to be deeply impressed by any happening, event or biography which he knows to be fictitious. For a lasting impression of any character, one needs the assurance that every detail of the life, saying and doing of such a personality is perfectly true and verifiable. Historical stories have, for that very reason, a greater appeal than the works of fiction. Another reason for the historicity of a character, particularly if it is intended to impart a lesson to others, is that no bed-time fable, told to while away the hours of leisure, can be deemed to hold up a model for emulation. For nobody can be expected to follow a mythical or imaginary character, it is absolutely essential that the journal of a life presented as a model of virtuous human conduct should be perfectly authentic in accordance with the criterion set for acceptance of an event as historical.

We hold all the prophets of Allâh in reverence and pay homage to them. We also agree that every one of them was a truthful messenger of divine guidance but the Lord has Himself told us that –

Of these messengers, some of whom We have caused to excel others.

[2:253]

We believe that this was the honor granted to Muhammad (ﷺ) since he was the last of the line of prophets, bearer of the final and ever-abiding message of Allâh and, thus, he was sent as a standard of virtue and goodness for the guidance of mankind to the end of time. No other prophet was intended to be the seal of the divine messengers; nor were the teachings of any other prophet to last till the Last Day. No doubt they were all sent as model teachers and guides, but for a particular age and people. Whatever they had taught gradually vanished from the memory of humanity.

Now, let us think it over again, how many apostles were sent by Allâh to this world, to all the nations and countries? Their numbers must run into hundreds of thousands. Be that as it may, Islâmic traditions put the figure at one hundred and twenty-four thousand although the Qur'ân tells us the names of a few only. But, even of those whose names we know, how little of their life and character is known to the world? Although there are no means to verify it, the Hindus claim that theirs was the oldest civilization of the world. Their sacred writings mention innumerable sages, but is there one to be taken as a historical personality? There are many amongst these saints and sages about whom nothing except their names are known to us; there are others who can be treated as mythological personalities rather than characters belonging to the realm of history. More detailed knowledge of the noble personages described in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are undoubtedly available, but can their lives be tested on the touchstone of history? Nobody knows the age, or the era, or the century, or the year, or period when they lived. Certain European orientalisks have, of late, hazarded their opinion when these sages would have been living, but this is the only evidence available about their historicity. A majority of these experts do not even regard them as historical and deny that the mythological personalities described in these books were ever born on this earth.

Zoroaster, the founder of the ancient Iranian faith named after him, is still revered by a large number of people, but his historical personality is also hidden behind the mist of obscurity. Several sceptical orientalisks of Europe and America have doubts if a man with this name ever lived in this world. Even the scholars who accept Zoroaster's historical existence, have only succeeded in giving, through guess-work, some paltry details about his life. These accounts are so contradictory that no reasonable standard of practical human life can be based on them. Where was Zoroaster born, what was the year, what

was his nationality or family, what was the religion he preached, whether the scripture attributed to him is genuine, what was the language spoken by him, when and where he died, each of these questions has elicited a hundred contradictory answers since no authentic and dependable records about him are available to clear the mist of doubt and uncertainty shrouding Zoroaster's personality. The Zoroastrians, or the Parsees, as they are known today, lack acknowledged traditions about their Master and have to depend on the researches of European scholars for answering these questions. Their national sources do not go beyond Firdausi's *Shâhnâma*. It is hardly an excuse that the Greek invaders of Iran had destroyed their scriptures; the point is that they exist no more. The very fact of their destruction settles the issue that the teachings of Zoroaster, whatever they had been, were not meant to be ever-abiding. This, by the way, is the reason why orientalist like Kern and Darmeteter refuse to accept Zoroaster as a historical figure.

Another religion of ancient Asia was Buddhism, which was once the dominant faith of the people of India, China, the whole of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Turkistan and is still a living faith in Burma, Indo-China, China, Japan and Tibet. It was exterminated in India by Brahmanism and replaced by Islâm in the Central Asia, but the power it commanded in South-Asia still sustains its faith and culture. Nevertheless, has its continued existence in several countries succeeded in preserving the dependable annals of Buddha's life and work? The age when the Buddha lived is calculated with reference to the time of Rajas of Magadh, which, in turn, is fixed by the chance discovery of diplomatic relations that these rulers had established with the Greeks. We have even more scant details about the life of Confucius, the founder of China's Confucianism, although the number of its adherents is still reported to be very very large.

Semites have had hundreds of prophets; nevertheless, history knows hardly anything about most of them except their names. Only a few incidents about the lives of Noah, Abraham, Sâlih, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Zachariah and John (عليه السلام) are known to posterity. All the important links transmitting the details of their lives and doings are missing from the chain of history. How, then, can the incomplete, disjointed accounts of the lives of these patriarchs serve as beacons of guidance to humanity today? Barring the description of their morals and conduct given in the Qur'ân, all that is told about them in the Jewish Scriptures is held to be spurious by competent scholars. Even if we were to ignore these criticisms, only a dim and incomplete picture of these men of God emerges from the Jewish writings.

Torah [Torah is the Hebrew word for "the Pentateuch."] is the chief source of information about Moses, but if the experts and authors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* are to be believed, the Scripture extant today was written hundreds of years after the death of Moses. Some German scholars even claim to have discovered a two-fold tradition on which the Torah is based for it carries the inconsistencies of its original sources. The learned discourse on this issue can be seen in the article included under the heading "Bible" in the latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition). If these criticisms of the scholars are deemed to be correct, as they are generally accepted, what historical validity can be claimed for the records of other events prior to Moses (ﷺ)?

Gospels are the records of the life of Jesus Christ (ﷺ). The Christian world, however, accepts only four of them and rejects others, like the Gospels of Thomas and Barnabas, as apocryphal. However, not one of the writers of these four 'authentic' Gospels ever saw

Jesus (ﷺ). Nothing is known about the sources on which these Gospels are based. Doubts have been raised whether the Gospels bearing the names of their authors were actually written by them. Even the time and language of the original Gospels are uncertain. Biblical scholars hold the view that the four extant Gospels were compiled from various sources from about 60 C.E. onwards. In regard to these dubious elements as well as the stories of birth and death of Jesus (ﷺ) and the doctrine of Trinity, certain critics have expressed the view, as discussed recently by a famous Chicago journal in its several issues, that the story of Christ is purely fictitious, adopted from Greek and Roman myths containing similar stories of birth, death and resurrection of some pagan gods. The researches into the origin of the Gospels show how puzzling and insufficient is the evidence to rediscover the Jesus (ﷺ) of history.

That any human being should be set up as a perennial guide for man, it is most essential to have the entire life of that model before us. No incident, no part of the life of such a shining example should remain in the dark. Like an open book it should be known inside out so that humanity may be able to make out how far that life can serve as an ideal guide and teacher.

Viewed from this angle, none of the preachers and founders of the religions would stand the test of historicity except the Prophet of Islâm. The uniqueness of Muhammad (ﷺ) in this regard furnishes yet another testimony to the fact that he alone was sent down to this world as the seal of prophets. Only three or four of the founders of religions, as earlier stated by us, can at best be put forth as historical characters, but not all of them can claim that everything about their life and character is known to the world. Buddhists form today about one-fourth of the world's population, but all that we know of the life of the Buddha consists of a mixture of fables and folklores. If we were to make a search for the missing links of his life, we would decidedly be unsuccessful in our quest. All that we can glean from the stories known about him is that a certain chieftain in the foothills of the Himalayas, South of Nepal, had a son who was endowed with a thoughtful disposition. After he had grown to manhood and become father of a child, he happened to see certain persons afflicted with misery. He was so shocked by the sufferings and decay manifest in all earthly things around him that he left his hearth and home to discover a higher and more enduring meaning in life and human destiny. He wandered all over the land – Varânasî, Pâtâlîputra and Râjgîr – sometimes he roamed in the cities, at others rambled over the mountains and forests, and ultimately reached Gayâ, where, sitting under a Bodhi-tree, he made the claim of having attained enlightenment. Thereafter, he went about expounding his discovery from Varânasî to Bihar and then left this fleeting world. This is, in fine, the sum total of our knowledge about the Buddha.

Zoroaster was also the founder of a faith. But nothing save surmises and conjectures about his life is the knowledge possessed by the world today. Rather than recounting the fictions about him we would better direct our attention to the resume of findings by an expert given in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in an article bearing his name:

The person of the Zoroaster whom we meet with in these hymns (of *Gâthâs*) differs *toto caelo* [Latin = by the whole heaven, *ed.*] from the Zoroaster of the younger *Avesta*. He is the exact opposite of the miraculous personage of a later legend.

[*Ibid*, 11th edition. vol. 28, p. 1042.]

After giving a description of the *Gatha*, the writer continues:

Yet we must not expect too much from the *Gâthâs* in the way of definite details. They give no historical account of the life and teaching of their prophet, but rather are, so to

say, *versus memoriales*, which recapitulate the main points of interest, often again in brief outlines.

[*Ibid.*]

Again, as to the birth place of Zoroaster, the writer goes on to say, “As to his birth place, the testimonies are conflicting.”

No consensus of opinion exists about the time of Zoroaster, which is hotly disputed by Greek historians as well as modern authorities. The writer of the article reaches the conclusion that-

Agathies remarks (ii-24), with perfect truth, that it is no longer possible to determine with any certainty when he lived and legislated.

All we know about Zoroaster is that he was born somewhere in Azarbaijan, preached his religion around Balkh, converted King Vistaspa to his faith, worked certain miracles, married and had a few children, and then died somewhere. Can anybody lay a claim that a person about whom our information is so limited and paltry is a well-known personality, fit to be put forth as a guiding star for humanity?

Moses (ﷺ) is the most celebrated among the prophets of old. Let us leave aside the question relating to the authenticity of Torah, as it exists at present, and assume that its five books contain a correct and dependable account of its author. But, what do they tell us? The life story of this great Prophet told by the Torah can be summed up in a few sentences. Moses (ﷺ) is brought up by an Egyptian princess in the palace of Pharaoh. After he comes of age, he helps the oppressed Bani Israel on one or two occasions and then he takes flight to Midian, where he marries and returns to Egypt again after a long period of exile. On his way back, mantle of prophethood falls upon him, he goes to the court of Pharaoh, works certain miracles and demands the emancipation of the enslaved Hebrews. He takes the advantage of a dark night to flee with his people from Egypt; Pharaoh leads the hordes of warriors and chariots thundering after Bani Israel; the sea gives way to Moses (ﷺ) and his followers; but the watery walls surge back over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses (ﷺ) takes his people to Arabia, and thence to Syria, fights the unbelieving folk living there and ultimately meets his death, on a hill, after he has grown quite old. Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah, thus describes the journey's end of Moses in the concluding paragraphs:

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. And Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated... And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom Lord knew face to face.

[Deut. 34:5-7,10.]

All the five books of Torah, the last of which is Deuteronomy, are believed to have been written by Moses (ﷺ) himself. But, the few sentences cited above suggest, on the first glance, that the book of Deuteronomy, or at least its concluding portion, could have never been written by Moses (ﷺ). Nobody knows the name of Moses' (ﷺ) biographer.

Similarly the words: “no man knows his sepulchre unto this day” and “there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses” clearly indicate that the Book must have been written after a fairly long time when people had lost trace of such an important monument as the grave of their greatest benefactor, or, it could be that the whole nation

had forgotten all about Moses (ﷺ) in the glimmerings of a new redeemer expected by them.

“Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died,” says the Deuteronomy, but how little do we know of the events of his long life? Only a few sketchy and disjointed events of Moses’ (ﷺ) life, like his birth, migration to Midian, marriage and early period of ministry and exodus have been related by his biographer. He is then seen taking part in a few battles but makes his exit to enter the scene again when he has grown quite old. Let us wean our thoughts from the ups and downs of Moses’ (ﷺ) life for every man has to undergo a chapter of accidents which are peculiar in each case, but we do need to know about the morals and conduct, demeanor and behavior of a guide and leader of mankind. These very essential details of the life of Moses (ﷺ) form the missing links of his story, however. Old Testament is replete with such trivialities as the ancestral lineage of its characters, population of the Hebrews at different periods and places and their rites and customs. Howsoever important these details may be for the study of the Holy Land’s geography and chronology, genealogy and sociology, but they are hardly of any practical utility for compilation of the biography of a religious guide like Moses (ﷺ). This deficiency makes the characterization of Moses incomplete.

The apostle of Allâh nearest in time to the Prophet of Islâm was Jesus Christ (ﷺ) whose followers today outnumber the votaries of every other religion. Strange though it may seem, but it is a hard fact that the details of the life of this Prophet available today are the most meagre in comparison to the founders of all other religions. The keen interest taken by the Christendom in the study of ancient civilizations, archaeological excavations and deciphering of ancient writings has shed light on the distant past of Babylon, Assyria, Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, India and Turkistan and succeeded in rewriting not a few lost pages of the ancient history; yet, if it has failed anywhere to recover the missing pieces of the eternal landscape of the past, it is the sealed book of its own savior’s life story. Earnest Renan left no stone unturned to recreate the *Vie de Jesus* [published in 1863] but, as everybody knows, his effort proved fruitless. The New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ (ﷺ) died at the age of thirty-three but it records the events of the last three years of his life only. Even this is either not supported by sufficient evidence or has been proved to be dubious by clear evidence to the contrary. The only information we have about the historical Jesus (ﷺ) is that he was brought to Egypt after his birth, worked a few miracles during his childhood; but then he quits the scene to reappear at the age of thirty, baptizing and preaching the gospel to fishermen in the mountains beside the sea of Galilee. He gathers a handful of followers, has a few discussions about the Law with the priests and elders, got arrested by the Jews and produced before Pontius Pilate, is ultimately crucified and his sepulchre is found vacant on the third day. Nobody knows where Jesus (ﷺ) remained or what he did during the twenty-five years of his life’s duration. And, of the happenings narrated about his last three years, what else is there except a few parables, miracles and crucifixion?

A biography to be ideal must also be **comprehensive**. In other words, whatever light and guidance people need in different walks of life – for fulfillment of their duties, redeeming the pledges, being fair and just and virtuous – should be had from the life of the ideal personage. Viewed from this angle, one would have to concede that only the life of the Prophet of Islâm conforms to this standard. What is religion, after all? It is nothing save a means to unfold the relationship, on the one hand, between man and his Master,

and, on the other, between man and man. Religion is, thus, meant to teach us the obligations we owe to God and our rights and duties with reference to our fellow beings; and, hence, it becomes a bounden duty of the follower of every religion to find out what light the life of his prophet or founder of religion sheds on these questions. From this standpoint, however, one would not find complete guidance anywhere save in the life of Muhammad (ﷺ), the last Prophet of Allâh.

Religions are of two kinds. One, religions like Buddhism and Jainism which are agnostic, denying the existence of God. It would, therefore, be futile to look for the awareness of God's nature and attributes or the tender regard and adoration for Allâh and His Omnipotence and Unicity in the life of the precursors of these religions. The others are theistic faiths which acknowledge the existence of the Supreme Being in one form or the other, but the lives of their founders breathe little of their devotion to God. The portraits of their lives do not pretend to be shadows of divine perfection, nor do they tell us explicitly about their quest for Allâh or their beliefs and convictions. Go through the Old Testament and you would find quite a few references to the Oneness of Allâh, His commandments and the rules for offering oblations unto Allâh, but hardly a sentence describing the feeling of awe and gratitude to Allâh, spiritual exaltation and a living awareness of the Supreme Being experienced by Moses (ﷺ). Had the religion of Moses (ﷺ) been the last and abiding principle of divine guidance, its followers must have preserved the aids to spiritual elevation; but they failed to do so, perhaps, as designed by Providence.

Gospels are the mirrors of Christ's (ﷺ) life. They tell us that God is the 'Father of Jesus,' but what obligations the 'son' owed to his 'Father' and how he answered this call of duty? The son declares the great love of the Father for him, but how much did the son love his heavenly Father? How he obeyed His commands, how he paid Him divine honours, how he bowed and humbled himself to show his reverence and whether he asked the Father to grant him anything else save the day's bread? We do not know whether Jesus (ﷺ) spent his nights in prayers and vigils except the one before his betrayal and arrest. What spiritual enlightenment and inspiration can we draw from a prophet like him? Had the gospelists clearly portrayed the picture of communion between Jesus Christ (ﷺ) and Allâh instead of spinning myths around him, the first Christian Emperor would not have had to convene the Nicene Council, after 325 years of the birth of Christ, to draw up a statement of Christian creed which remains an inexplicable riddle to this day.

Turning to the rights and duties of human beings, we again fail to find any dear exposition of this important matter in the life of any prophet or founder of religion except the life of Muhammad (ﷺ). Gautama Buddha left his home and family, severing all connections from his loving wife and innocent son, to discover the meaning of human destiny in the solitude of the woods. He said good-bye to his friends and abandoned the responsibility of administration in order to find the peace of *Nirvâna* by overcoming the desire arising out of his will-to-live. Now, one can ask what message does the teaching of the Buddha contain for the common man, for the rulers and the ruled, for the rich and the poor, for the master and the servant; and how does it provide guidance in the discharge of one's obligations as a father, as a son, or as a brother, sister or friend? Are the teachings of the Buddha comprehensive enough to be followed by the ascetics and businessmen alike? His teachings were, in point of fact, never acted upon by the working classes, else

the administration in the countries like China, Japan, Siam, Tibet and Burma would have long gone to winds; trade, industry and business would have come to a standstill; and the populous cities would have turned into woodlands.

Moses (ﷺ) was an illustrious leader of men; noted for commanding the Hebrew hordes in the battlefields. He could thus be a model in the case of a call to arms, but has he left any precedent to be followed in the discharge of one's rights and duties and fulfillment of one's obligations to others? How he wanted the wife and the husband, the father and the son, brothers and friends to behave towards one another, what were his custom in making peace with his adversaries; how he spent his wealth for the benefit of the sick and the poor, the orphan and the wayfarers? Moses (ﷺ) was married, had children as well as a brother, relatives and friends and, we believe, as an Apostle of Allâh, his behavior towards them would have been exemplary. But, we are at a loss to find any guidance in these matters from the books of Scripture attributed to him!

Jesus Christ (ﷺ) had his mother and, as the Bible tells us, he had brothers and sisters and even his earthly father, although he was born of a virgin mother. Nevertheless, the story of his life told in the Gospels keeps mum about his behavior towards his kith and kin. Social relationship has been, and shall ever remain, the pivot of civilized existence, and hence every religion must seek to regulate it. But, what is there in the life of Jesus Christ (ﷺ) to offer guidance in these matters? He belonged to a subject race ruled by an alien power. How could he, then, set any example for the rulers and administrators? He did not marry, and hence his life has nothing to guide the spouses whose relationship of love and affection has been spoken of in the very first chapter of the Old Testament. Furthermore, since an overwhelming portion of world's population leads a married life, Jesus' (ﷺ) life would come amiss to offer any guidance to them. Verily, Jesus (ﷺ) can never be the ideal guide of humanity for he ever remained indifferent to his relatives, had nothing to do with earning and spending, war and peace and friends and foes. These very mundane affairs, unfortunately, form the hub of our earthly life. Were this world to follow the example of Jesus (ﷺ), all progress will be suspended and the silence of the grave would descend over the world. Christian Europe would, then, die a natural death.

Yet another determinant of an ideal, life is its **practicality** – a decisive test for a founder of religion or law-giver; since, the preacher of a canon and system of belief should be able to lead the way by his personal example of living up to his precepts. His actions, in other words, should demonstrate the feasibility of his teachings.

Anybody can enunciate any number of fanciful notions, attractive concepts and appealing philosophies, but not everyone can live up to them. Innocent and fine maxims are no proof of one's virtuous character: it rather consists of following the narrow, straight path of unblemished rectitude. Were it not so, it would be difficult to distinguish between vice and virtue, good and bad and the world would then abound in agreeable chatters. Now, let us judge the founders of religions by this acid test.

“But I say unto you which hear,” said Jesus Christ (ﷺ), “Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.” [Luke, 6:27-30] Jesus (ﷺ) also taught that one should forgive one's brother's misdemeanor not only seven times but “seventy times seven” [Mt., 18:22] and that “a rich man shall hardly enter into

the kingdom of heaven.”[Mt, 19:22] Many more such sayings of Jesus (ﷺ) and other teachers can be cited here but none can be treated as a wholesome moral precept unless it is also accompanied by a practical example of the preacher. These would be mere preachings, rather than examples of practical conduct. How can one forgive his enemies unless he has first subdued them? What does charity, benevolence and philanthropy of a man mean, if he is not blessed with anything to spare? Just as the man who has not married and has no children and relations cannot be held forth as an ideal husband, or a loving father, or a gracious kinsman; how can one be taken as a model of mercy, kindness and forgiveness if one had never had an opportunity to pardon anybody?

Virtues are of two kinds: one is positive and the other negative. Living like an anchorite in a far off cave can, at the most, be reckoned as a negative virtue for the ascetics merely abstain from doing harm to others. But, what about the positive side of their actions? Do they help the poor, feed the hungry, raise the fallen or guide the erring? Forgiveness, charity, philanthropy, hospitality, truthfulness, kindness, zeal to restore truth and justice and fulfillment of one’s obligations are some of the cardinal virtues requiring positive action. Virtues are, of a fact, more often positive than negative.

It would now be clear that there could be no “ideal life” – to be followed by others – unless its positive and practical aspect is also before us. How can we follow the example of any guide, if it is not illustrated? We want precedents for waging war and making peace, for leading our lives in affluence and poverty, for living as married couples and celibates, for our communion with Allâh and social relationship with our fellow beings. In victory and defeat, in anger and forbearance, in loneliness and companionship, in short, in every situation of life marked by vicissitudes of our earthly existence we need an exemplar to show us the right path. We require practical examples of those who have successfully met these situations and found a solution rather than those who have nothing to offer except sweet words. It is neither the poet’s fancy nor the flower of speech, but an indisputable fact of history that no other life save that of Muhammad (ﷺ), the last Prophet of Allâh, answers the test of practicality.

To recapitulate the essential ingredients of an ideal life, discussed afore, let me repeat that **historicity, comprehensiveness, perfection** and **practicality** are necessary for any character to be followed by others. I do not mean to say that other prophets lacked these qualities, but I do assert that the record of their lives and doings preserved by their followers and handed down to us throw no light on these aspects of their character. This was in conformity with the will of Allâh, perhaps, as it constitutes, in itself, an intrinsic evidence that the prophets of yore were sent to their own peoples and for their own times. Their biographies were not preserved because posterity did not need them. It was only Muhammad (ﷺ), the last of the prophets, who was sent by Allâh for all the nations, as a shining example, to be followed by the entire humanity until the Day of Judgment. His biography, the record of his sayings and doings, had thus to be durable and ever fresh, and this is the greatest testimony, a practical attestation of the finality of Muhammad’s (ﷺ) prophethood.

Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allâh and the Seal of the Prophets, and Allâh is Aware of all things.

[33:40]

Chapter Three

Historicity

Let us now have a closer look at the biography of the Prophet of Islâm ﷺ to see how far it answers the fourfold criteria earlier enunciated by me. The first of these is historicity.

The way Islâm has safely preserved not only the life story of its Prophet ﷺ, but also everything even remotely connected with him, is simply a marvel of history. The people who have handed down, collected and codified the sayings and doings and other incidents in the life of the holy Prophet ﷺ are known as narrators, traditionists and biographers; among these we find the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, their sons and successors – scholars belonging to the period up to the fourth century of Islâmic era. After all this material had been committed to writing, the biographical details of the narrators, that is the backgrounds and the characters of the people in any way connected with the transmission of the “narrations” relating to the Prophet ﷺ, were also put into writing. All this encyclopaedic compilation of about a hundred thousand biographical sketches is known as *Asmâ-ur-Rijâl*. Dr. A. Sprenger, the celebrated German scholar, who was closely associated with the educational and literary activities of the Bengal Asiatic Society till 1854, and who published the *Maghâzî* of Wâqidî as edited by Von Kremer in 1856, also brought out the *Al-Isâbah-fi-Tamîzis-Sahâbah*, a collection of the biographies of the Prophet’s ﷺ companions by Hâfiz Ibn Hajar. As Dr. A Sprenger claims that he was the first European to have written the *Life of Mohammad* [published from Allahabad in 1851] drawing his material from the original Arabic sources. Although Dr. A. Sprenger has written the Prophet’s ﷺ biography spitefully with a malicious glance, he had to acknowledge in his introduction to the *Isâbah* the unsurpassable feat of Muslim historiography in these words:

“The glory of the literature of the Mohammadans is its literary biography. There is no nation, nor there has been any which like them has during twelve centuries recorded the life of every man of letters. If the biographical records of the Mohammadans were collected, we should probably have accounts of the lives of half a million of distinguished persons, and it would be found that there is not a decennium of their history, nor a place of importance which has not its representatives.” [*Al-Isâbah*, 1, p.1.]

The Prophet ﷺ had performed his last *Haj* known as the Farewell Pilgrimage with more than a hundred thousand companions who are called *sahâbah*. History records the lives of about eleven thousand of these companions who have transmitted some saying or an act of the Prophet ﷺ to others. Their narration of the *ahâdîth* or traditions of the Prophet of Islâm ﷺ has made them a part of recorded history.

The holy Prophet ﷺ departed from this world in 11 A.H./632 C.E. while the elderly companions remained alive up to 40 A.H./660 C.E., although the juniors among them were then still quite numerous. It is reported that by the close of the first century after *Hijrah* nearly all of them had breathed their last. We give here the names of the companions رضى الله عنهم who were to breath their last in different parts of the Islâmic realm:

Name	Place of death	Year (A.H./C.E.)
1. Abû Umâmah Bâhilî	Syria	86/705
2. ‘Abd Allâh b. Hârith b. Jazr	Egypt	86/705

3. ‘Abd Allâh b. Abû ‘Awfâ	Kufa	87/705
4. Sâhib b. Yazîd	Madina	91/709
5. Anas b. Mâlik	Basra	93/711

Anas b. Mâlik رضي الله عنه, who was the last to die, was the personal servant of the Prophet ﷺ and had served him for ten years at Madina.

The era of the companion’s successors, who are known as *tâbi’în*, actually begins from the time of the Prophet’s ﷺ migration to Madina. They were the persons who had seen and conversed with some companion of the Prophet ﷺ but not with the Prophet himself ﷺ. Many of them had already been born when the Prophet ﷺ was alive, but either being too young or being away from Madina, they had not shared the company of the Prophet ﷺ. To name only a few, ‘Abdur Rahmân b. Hârith was born in 3/624, Qais b. Abî Hâzim in 4/625 and Sa’îd b. Mus’ab in 5/626. Several others like them are regarded as companion’s disciples. They had dispersed with the widening of Islâmîc frontiers, and taken up residence in far-flung areas, teaching and preaching the tenets of Islâm and the practice of the Prophet ﷺ they learnt from their elders. Their number was fairly large, for, in Madina alone there were 139 of them who had taken lessons at the feet of elder companions of the Prophet ﷺ. Besides these, Madina had 129 more who had learnt the Prophet’s ﷺ traditions from several companions, although their teachers were not reckoned among the elders, while another 87 had picked up information about the Prophet ﷺ from one or two of his companions only. There were, thus, 355 of them in Madina alone as reported by Ibn Sa’d. The number of the companions’ disciples only in one city is sufficient to indicate their vast numbers spread over in Makkah, Taif, Basra, Kufa, Damascus, Yemen and Egypt. [The number of *Tâbi’în* in Makkah, Kufa and Basrah, as given by Ibn S’ad was 131, 413 and 164 respectively. The last *tâbi’ee* was Khalaf b. Khalîfah who died in 181 A.H./797 C.E. He was a disciple of ‘Âmir b. Wâi’lah رضي الله عنه, a companion of the Prophet ﷺ.] These were the persons who had devoted themselves to preaching and disseminating the examples of the Prophet ﷺ. Now, if we assume that every companion had narrated at least a few sayings and doings of the Prophet ﷺ to his disciples, which were all codified later on, what a large number of these narratives would have come to be recorded by then! However, the number of traditions transmitted by some of the Prophet’s ﷺ companions, given here, would give a more exact idea of the great number of such reports:

Name of companion	Number of Traditions
1. Abû Huraira (d.59/678)	5374
2. ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Abbâs (d.68/687)	2660
3. ‘Âyesha (d.58/677)	2220
4. ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Umar (d.73/692)	1630
5. Jâbir b. ‘Abd Allâh (d.78/697)	1560
6. Anas b. Mâlik (d.93/711)	1286
7. Abû Sa’îd al-Khudri (d.74/693)	1170

The traditions narrated by these masters, who were all close companions of the Prophet ﷺ, form the chief source of the Prophet’s ﷺ biography. The years in which they died point out the fact that they lived long enough after the demise of the holy Prophet ﷺ to

impart the knowledge possessed by them to a large number of persons. Those were the days when the knowledge of prophetic traditions was the only branch of learning that enjoyed recognition and patronage of the society, and warranted an honored place in religious as well as worldly circles. Thousands of the Prophet's ﷺ companions were thus acting on the dictum of their beloved Master who had ordained: "Disseminate whatever you hear from me," and "Inform those not present whatever you hear or see of me." They considered it a great purpose of their lives to educate their sons and successors, friends and acquaintances about the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ. By the time this generation breathed its last, the keen desire and solicitude awakened by them brought up a new generation of enthusiastic learners and scholars, moved by an unbounded zeal to safeguard the precious treasure bequeathed to them by their predecessors. The method of instruction in those days required that the students memorize every word of what they were taught and then to repeat it before being allowed to teach others. The Prophet ﷺ had, while insisting on the propagation of his words and deeds, also warned them that "he who willfully distorted his teachings or spread any false report about him would be doomed." The result was that sometimes even eminent companions and erudite scholars were seen trembling to the fiber of their being while narrating any tradition, lest they should commit a mistake and earn eternal wrath of the Lord. 'Abd Allâh b. Mas'ûd رضي الله عنه was so very careful that once when he narrated something about the Prophet ﷺ, his face turned pale as death and then he hastily added: "The Prophet ﷺ had spoken it thus or something like this." [This is the reason for use of the phrase "Allâh knows best", by the traditionists and Muslim writers, which is misunderstood by most of the orientalisists as an indication of doubt and uncertainty. It speaks volumes of their understanding of Islâm!]

Strong memory was the nature's gift to the Arabs who could memorize hundreds of verses eulogizing their tribes and forefathers and even the horses of good breed. Like every other human faculty, retentive memory is also strengthened by constant practice. The Prophet's ﷺ companions and their successors, who were always eager to store in their minds the smallest detail pertaining to the Prophet ﷺ, had developed this faculty to unbelievable perfection. They used to learn by heart every act and incident, words and deeds of the Prophet ﷺ with the same care and scrupulousness as the Muslims still memorize the Qur'an. Every traditionist could repeat, word for word, tens of thousands of traditions; and though he often committed them to writing, he could not expect to command the respect of others unless he could also reproduce them from his memory. Since consultation of one's writings was taken as an evidence of forgetfulness and was a discredit to a scholar, one normally kept such annotations for private use only.

Some orientalisists, particularly Sir William Muir and Ignaz Goldziher have raked together all possible doubts about the accuracy of the traditions, particularly in regard to their codification and compilation, which, they assert, were taken in hand ninety years after the death of the Prophet ﷺ. I have explained here in some detail what meticulous and painstaking efforts were made by the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, from the very first day, to ensure the accuracy of the traditions. Their trustworthiness, solicitude and carefulness are, of a fact, sufficient to set at rest all the doubts in this regard.

Nevertheless, there were reasons, as I would presently tell you, for the diffidence of the companions to put the traditions into writing, at least, in the earlier stages.

The first reason was that in the initial stages the Prophet ﷺ had forbidden to write anything save the sacred Scripture. The Prophet ﷺ is related to have instructed his

companions: “Do not write from me anything except the Qur’an.”[*Taqyid*, pp.29-35] This command was meant for the common people in order to guard against the mixing up of the revelations with the traditions. But when the revelation was fairly completed and the people had learnt to distinguish between the two, the Prophet ﷺ permitted the companions to take down what they heard from him.[*Al-Tabaqât*, 2,i,p.125; 4,i,p.8; 7,ii,p.189; *Al-Musnad*, II, pp.162, 192, 207, 215] There were, however, companions who ever remained over-cautious and refrained from writing anything of the traditions for fear of committing a mistake and thus incurring the displeasure of the Prophet ﷺ.

Another reason, as referred to earlier, was the reluctance of the Arabs to write anything that ought to be memorized. Some of the companions held the view that once the narratives relating to the Prophet ﷺ were put into writing, the people would give up the practice of learning them by heart. In their view, writing of anything made the people indolent, for, once a written record came into existence, people developed the habit of consulting it when need arose. The fear was not entirely unfounded, since, we see that as the annotations of traditions grew in number, scholars gradually gave up the practice of enshrining them in their memory. Later on, it did not remain a bar to the scholarship to rely entirely on written records.

The third reason was that the Arabs disliked to write anything and then get it to their heart by rote. To them, it was an evidence of short memory and, for that reason, if anybody ever took down something, he tried to hide it from others.

The earlier scholars were of the opinion that anything inscribed in the hearts of the people was much safer and more lasting than what was penned on paper. A written record was, in their view, always open to interpolation and destruction while something dwelling in the people’s memory was beyond the reach of any intrusion.

For all that, it is not true that the reports about the Prophet’s ﷺ teachings, life and conduct were transmitted only by word of mouth for the first ninety or hundred years, as assumed by the orientalists. The reason for this erroneous assumption is that the *Muwatta* of Mâlik b. Anas and the *Al-Maghâzi* of Ibn Is’hâq are generally taken as the first compilations on the Prophet’s ﷺ biography. Both these writers were contemporaries who died in 179/795 and 151/768 respectively, and hence these sciences were wrongly dated as originating in the second century after Hijrah. The facts are, however, otherwise, since there is ample evidence to prove that the compilation of these materials had started much earlier.

Caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azîz, who died in the year 101/719, was himself a noted scholar and had been the governor of Madina before his nomination as Caliph in 99/717. Immediately after ascending the caliphate, he sent an edict to Qazi Abû Bakr b. Muhammad b. ‘Amr b. Hazm al-Ansâri (d. 117/735) saying: “Start compiling the traditions of the Prophet ﷺ, for I fear that these will be lost gradually.”[*Al-Dârimi*, 1, p.126; *Al-Tabaqât al-Kabîr*, 8, p.353; *al-Saghîr*, p. 105. Orientalists like Guillaume, Ruth, Goldziher and Schacht have expressed doubts about the trustworthiness of his report, but they have failed to take notice of the fact that ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azîz had directed not only Abû Bakr b. Muhammad b. ‘Amr b. Hazm but also Al-Zuhri (*Bukhâri al-Saghîr*, p. 105) and others (Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bâri*, I, p. 204) to collect the traditions. In fact, Al-Zuhri agreed to allow making copies of his own compilation by his students on the persuasion of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azîz. A lengthy quotation from the work of Zuhri, compiled and sent to other centers under the orders of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azîz, is

preserved by Abu ‘Uбайд al-Qâsim b. Sallâm (*Amwâl*, p. 578-581).] The command of Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, mentioned in the *Tabaqât* of al-Bukhârî, *Muwatta* of Mâlik and *Musnad* of Dârimi, was executed by Qâzi Abû Bakr who compiled all the available reports and submitted them to the Caliph. Copies of this compilation were sent to all the provincial capitals of the Islâmîc empire. [*Bayân al-‘Ilm*, p.38; *Ajjaj*, p.494] Qâzi Abû Bakr was specially selected for the job since he was then Qâzi at Madina. An additional reason for his selection was that his mother’s sister, ‘Amra, was the chief disciple of ‘Âyesha رضي الله عنها, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ and the mother of believers, and thus whatever the former had learnt from her venerable mentor had already been committed into writing by Qâzi Abû Bakr. Caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz had accordingly asked him to pay particular attention to codify the traditions transmitted by ‘Âyesha رضي الله عنها.

There is, in fact, sufficient evidence to show that several reports of the commands and utterances, events and incidents relating to the Prophet ﷺ had been compiled even during his lifetime. On the occasion of the peaceful occupation of Makkah, the holy Prophet ﷺ had delivered a sermon. Al-Bukharî and several other traditionists report that on the request of Abû Shah رضي الله عنه, a companion hailing from Yemen, the Prophet ﷺ had caused the sermon to be transcribed from him [*Al-Sahîh, Kitâb al-‘Ilm*, 3, p.49; *As-Sunan*, 24, 3 (*Kitâb al-‘Ilm* 4-5); *Al-Jâmî*, 12, 2 (*Kitâb al-‘Ilm*)]. The Prophet of Islâm ﷺ had also sent letters to several emperors and rulers of the countries around Arabia inviting them to embrace Islâm. [The Prophet ﷺ had sent a number of letters to different rulers. The original letter of the Prophet ﷺ to Heraclius was in Spain for long centuries; it has reappeared now but remains to be studied scientifically. The original letter to Muqauqis of Egypt is preserved, and is now in the Topkapi Museum at Istanbul. The Nagus of Abyssinia was also recipient of several letters from the Prophet ﷺ, one of which exists at Damascus. Half a dozen or more letters of the Prophet’s ﷺ correspondence with Al-Mundhir b. Sâwâ, the ruler of Bahrain, have been recorded in history, including one whose original has come down to us. It was first published from Berlin (*Muhammad Rasulallah*, pp. 97-105).]

A few years back, the letter addressed by the Prophet ﷺ to Muqauqis of Egypt was discovered within the hard cover of a book preserved in a local monastery. The photostatic copy of the letter, since published, confirms the content of reports transmitted by the early scholars of traditions, word for word, leaving no doubt about its authenticity. [c.f. photos and discussion see Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah’s *Le Prophete de l’Islâm*, pp.205-7, 212-16, 235-37. Also see *Islâmîc Culture*, October 1939, pp.427-39.] What else can one demand for the authenticity and trustworthiness of the traditionists? Abû Huraira رضي الله عنه is once reported to have claimed that nobody except ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Âs رضي الله عنه possessed a larger collection of the traditions than he had, but it was because the latter took down what he heard from the Prophet ﷺ while Abû Huraira رضي الله عنه did not do so [*Al-Sahîh, Kitâb al-‘Ilm*. ‘Amr b. al-‘Âs رضي الله عنه, named his book *al-Sahîfah al-Sâdiqâ* which he wrote after obtaining the permission of the Prophet ﷺ to record events and traditions from him. (*Hadîth Literature*, pp. 43-44).] Another tradition preserved in *As-Sunan Abû Dâwûd* and *Musnad Ibn Hanbal* says that ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Amr رضي الله عنه had, on one occasion, discontinued reducing the traditions into writing. It is related that an objection was raised that it was improper to take down everything for the Prophet ﷺ was, at times, in different frames of mind, happy or angry, and some of the remarks might not be actually meant for guidance of the people not present on the occasion. Later on, ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Amr رضي الله عنه

raised the matter with the Prophet ﷺ, who, pointing to his lips, replied, “You can write. Whatever comes out of them is just and right.” [Al-Sunan, II, p.77; Al-Sahîh, Kitâb al-‘Ilm, p. 39] ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Amr رضي الله عنه once remarked that he wanted Allâh to grant him life for two things. One was the *Sâdiqâ* in which he had written down whatever he had heard from the Prophet ﷺ in his own words [Al-Dârimi, p.69]. On one occasion, when Mujahid enquired from ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Amr رضي الله عنه about *Sâdiqâ*, the latter replied, “This is *Sâdiqâ* in which I have written down the Prophet’s ﷺ words as I heard them from him. Nobody intervenes in it between me and the Prophet ﷺ [Al-Sunan, II, ii, pp.125, 202].

Al-Bukhârî records a tradition that a few months after migration to Madînah, the Prophet ﷺ had ordered to take a census of the Muslims. The names thus recorded numbered one thousand five hundred [Al-Sahîh, Kitâb-ul-Jihâd]. Rules and tariffs of the zakât, covering two pages, were got written by the Prophet ﷺ for being sent to the *Qâdis* [judges] and tax collectors appointed by him. Copies of this document were preserved, for a long time, by Abû Bakr رضي الله عنه, descendants of ‘Amr b. Hazm رضي الله عنه, and several other persons [Al-Dâraqtuni, Kitâb-uz-Zakât, p.209]. Caliph ‘Ali رضي الله عنه also possessed certain written documents containing traditions of the Prophet ﷺ bearing on the Sharîah rules, which he used to keep in his scabbard and had shown to several persons [Al-Sahîh, II, pp.1020, 1084]. Another written document was the treaty of Hudaibiyah, drawn up in 6/628. It was committed into writing by ‘Ali b. Abî Tâlib رضي الله عنه at the instance of the Prophet ﷺ who had kept a copy of it and made over another to the Quraish of Makkah [Al-Tabaqât, Kitâb-ul-Maghâzî, p.71; Al-Sahîh, pp. 45, 64; Ibn Hishâm, p.747]. The instructions in regard to obligatory prayers, charity, blood-money, etc. were sent by the Prophet ﷺ to ‘Amr b. Hazm رضي الله عنه, the governor of Yemen [Kanz al-Umm’âl, III, p. 186]. Another letter containing instructions about dead animals was sent by the Prophet ﷺ to ‘Abd Allâh b. al-Hakîm رضي الله عنه [Al-Saghîr, p.217]. The Prophet ﷺ also gave written instructions in regard to prayers, fasting, usury, drinking, etc. to a companion, Wa’il b. Hajr رضي الله عنه, when the latter departed for his hometown in Hadhramaut [Ibid, p.242]. Once Caliph ‘Umar رضي الله عنه had an occasion to enquire from the people about the Prophet’s ﷺ practice in regard to blood money payable to the widows of the deceased. Al-Dahhâk b. Sufyan answered the question on the basis of a document which had been sent to his tribe by the Prophet ﷺ [Al-Dâraqtuni, p.485].

Caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz sent an emissary to Madînah, to obtain the document about rules of *zakât*. It was found with the successors of ‘Amr b. Hazm رضي الله عنه [Ibid, p.451]. The letters sent by the Prophet ﷺ to Yemen contained instructions about recitation of the Qur’ân, emancipation of slaves and divorce [Al-Dârimî, p.293]. When Ma’âz رضي الله عنه was deputed by the Prophet ﷺ to Yemen for religious instruction of the people there, he enquired in a letter whether *zakât* was payable on vegetables grown by the cultivators. The reply sent by the Prophet ﷺ forbade him to levy the tax in that case [Ibid, p.45].

When Marwân once said, during the course of his sermon that Makkah was a sanctuary, Rafe’y b. Khadîj رضي الله عنه immediately corrected him by declaring that Madînah also enjoyed the same privilege for he had a written document of the Prophet ﷺ to that effect with him [Al-Musnad, 4, p.141]. Dahhâk b. Qais had, on one occasion, enquired from another companion, Al-Nu’mân b. Bashir رضي الله عنه, about the *sûrah* of the Qur’ân normally recited by the Prophet ﷺ in Friday prayers. The letter sent in reply by the latter said that the Prophet ﷺ recited the chapter of *Hal Atâka* in these prayers [Muslim, II, p.323]. Caliph ‘Umar رضي الله عنه

sent a written instruction to ‘Utbah b. Farqad saying that the Prophet ﷺ had forbidden the use of silk [*Ibid*, p.307].

These are some of the written directions sent by the Prophet ﷺ or his immediate successors, from time to time, to the governors, *Qâdis*, tax-collectors and others. Evidence is also not lacking to show that some of the prominent companions had desired and actually compiled a set of such instructions. Caliph Abû Bakr رضي الله عنه had also made a collection but on reconsideration he destroyed the same [*Tadhkiratal-Huffâz*, I, p.5]. ‘Umar ibn al-Khattâb رضي الله عنه, the second Caliph, intended to make arrangements for the compilation of the Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم traditions. Although he was aware of the fact that his son, Abd Allâh رضي الله عنه, had made such a collection with the permission of the Prophet ﷺ, which was very often consulted by others, he finally gave up the idea lest it should be construed as an innovation [*Al-Jâmi*’, p.586]. Historians record the existence of a collection of juristic opinions pronounced by Caliph ‘Ali رضي الله عنه, which was later on presented to Ibn ‘Abbâs رضي الله عنه [*Muslim, Introd*]. The traditions compiled by ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Abbâs رضي الله عنه were copied out by certain persons belonging to Ta’if. They also showed it to him for correction and confirmation of the text [*Al-Jâmi*’, *Kitâb al-‘Ilal*, p.691]. Sa’id b. Jubair is also reported to have made a copy of the collection of ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Abbâs رضي الله عنه [*Al-Dârimî*, p.69]. A reference has been made of the *Sâdiqâ* of ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Âs رضي الله عنه. It is possible to trace this work in the *ahâdîth* narrated by ‘Amr b. Shu’aib as he utilized his grandfather ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Amr’s books [*Al-Jâmi*’, I, p.43]. He was criticised by the scholars since he used to read it out instead of being able to rehearse the same from memory [*Al-Tahdhîb*, VIII, p.49]. Jâbir b. ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Amr رضي الله عنه was a Madinian disciple of the Prophet ﷺ. Jâbir’s disciple Wahâb b. Munabbîh had compiled a *Sahîfa* under his teacher’s guidance which was later on transmitted to several scholars [*Al-‘Ilal*, I, p.318; *Al-Tahdhîb*, II, p.215], one of whom was Isma’îl b. ‘Abd al-Karîm. Another collection of Jâbir b. ‘Abd Allâh’s رضي الله عنه traditions was compiled by Sulaimân b. ‘Abd Allâh b. Qais al-Yashkuri who had three disciples, Abû al-Zubair, Abû Sufyân and Sho’aibi, all of whom rose as eminent scholars in the generation succeeding the companions [*Al-Tahdhîb*, I, p.316]. Sulaimân b. Samurah inherited a large collection of traditions from his father, Samurah b. Jundab رضي الله عنه, who was a companion of the Prophet ﷺ [*Ibid*, VI, p.211]. This was later on transmitted to others by Sulaimân’s son, Habîb [*Al-Tahdhîb*, IV, p.198]. A part of this work is still preserved in *Mu’jam al-Kabîr of al-Tabrâni*. Abû Hurairah رضي الله عنه is credited with the transmission of largest number of traditions among the Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم companions. One of his disciples, Hammâm b. Munabbih compiled a collection of traditions learnt from his teacher, which was known as *Sahîfah Hammâm* and was incorporated in the second volume of Ibn Hanbal’s *Musnad* (from pages 312 to 318). [Two manuscripts of this *Sahîfah*, a Berlin MSS and a Damascus MSS, have since been discovered and published with an English rendering by Dr. M. Hamidullah under the auspices of the Centre Cultural Islâmique, Paris. Recent researches have shown that out of 138 narrations in the *Sahîfah Hammâm*, as many as 98 were drawn by *Al-Bukhârî* and *Muslim*.] Bashîr b. Nahîk was another pupil of Abû Hurairah رضي الله عنه, who had made a collection of his traditions and even got it confirmed by Abû Hurairah رضي الله عنه before transmitting it to others [*Al-‘Ilal*, p.691; *Al-Dârimî*, p.68]. Abû Hurairah رضي الله عنه once showed this collection to some one, who reported that the compilation was not in the handwriting of Abû Hurairah رضي الله عنه [*Fath-al-Bâri*, I, pp.184-5].

Anas b. Mâlik رضي الله عنه, who served the Prophet ﷺ throughout his life, has narrated a large number of traditions [Al-Dârimi, p.68; Taqyîd, p.96]. He used to advise his sons to take down the *ahâdîth* narrated by him. A lady named Salamâ relates that she had seen ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Abbâs رضي الله عنه taking down the traditions from Abû Raf’ey رضي الله عنه, a servant of the Prophet ﷺ [Al-Tabaqât, II, ii, p.123]. Wâqidi is one of the earliest biographers of the Prophet ﷺ. He says that he had seen the letter sent by the Prophet ﷺ to Al-Mundhir b. Sâwâ, the Chief of Bahrain, in a heap of books of Ibn ‘Abbâs رضي الله عنه [Zâd al-Ma’âd, II, p.57]. The historian Tabârî is on record that a detailed account of the battle of Badr was written by ‘Urwah b. Zubair for Caliph ‘Abd Al-Mâlik [Târikh Tabarî, p.1285].

‘Abd Allâh b. Mas’ûd رضي الله عنه used to attend upon the Prophet ﷺ and had the permission to call upon him at any time. He did not approve of the writing of traditions and complained that although, in his view, nothing except the Qur’ân should be committed to writing, people came to enquire from him about the Prophet ﷺ and then wrote down whatever they heard from him [Al-Dârimi, p.69]. Sa’îd b. Jubair says that whenever he heard anything about the Prophet ﷺ from ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Umar and Ibn ‘Abbâs رضي الله عنهم in the night he took down notes and then made a copy in the morning [Ibid]. Al-Barâ b. ‘Âzib رضي الله عنه was a companion of the Prophet ﷺ. Students used to take down his lectures [Ibid, p.69; Al-‘Ilal, I, p.42; Taqyîd, p.105]. Nâfi, an emancipated slave of Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه, had been in the company of his master for thirty years. He used to dictate traditions to his disciples [Al-Dârimi, p.69]. ‘Abd Allâh b. Mas’ûd رضي الله عنه had a collection of traditions which was shown by his son ‘Abd al-Rahmân to several persons [Al-Jâmî, I, p.17]. Sa’îd b. Jubair is on record that whenever there was a conflict of opinion between him and his friends, he used to record it and then sought a clarification from Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه, although he never showed the writing to Ibn ‘Umar for he was against the recording of traditions [Ibid, I, p.33]. Al-Aswad was a young man among the descendants of the Prophet’s ﷺ companions. He relates that once he found a written collection of the traditions and called upon Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه with his friend ‘Alqamah, but Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه erased it completely [Ibid]. Zaid b. Thâbit رضي الله عنه acted as Prophet’s ﷺ scribe and was later on charged with the responsibility of making an authorized copy of the Qur’ân by Caliph ‘Uthman رضي الله عنه. He also did not approve of the writing of traditions. Therefore, in order to get the traditions known to him put into writing, Marwân got a scribe seated behind a curtain and asked Zaid b. Thâbit رضي الله عنه to relate whatever he knew about the Prophet ﷺ [Ibid]. Caliph Mu’âwiyah, too, once attempted to have some traditions recorded from him in the same manner but Zaid b. Thâbit رضي الله عنه got the scent of it and insisted on erasing what had been written [Al-Musnad, V, p.182].

Enough facts about the original sources have been cited to leave no shadow of doubt about the existence of authentic and reliable material available for the Prophet’s ﷺ biography. The quotations and references given here settle the matter that if written records were sufficient to warrant authenticity of historical facts, a vast treasure of these records had been left by the Prophet’s ﷺ companions. They not only wrote them but also taught their successors who incorporated everything learnt by them in their own writings. It is to be noted that the generation following the Prophet’s ﷺ companions collected and compiled every incident during the lifetime of their teachers. They enquired about every occurrence, every happening personally from door to door, from men and women, from the young and the old, and recorded everything for further research and verification by the later generations. Muhammad b. Muslim b. Shihâb al-Zuhrî (d.124/741), Hishâm b.

‘Urwah (d. 146/763), Qais b. Abû Hazim, ‘Ata b. Abû Rabâh (d. 117/735), Sa’îd b. Jubair al-Asdi (d.95/713) and ‘Abd Allâh b. Dhakwân Abû al-Zinâd (d. 130/747) were among the hundreds of those belonging to the sons and successors of the Prophet ﷺ companions who worked incessantly, as if under the cast of a spell, and collected a whole range of data which gives us a panoramic view of the holy Prophet’s ﷺ life, times and happenings. Shihâb al-Zuhrî, a great authority on the traditions, inscribed everything he came to know about the Prophet ﷺ. Abû Al-Zinâd relates that he recorded only the injunctions of the Prophet ﷺ relating to things made lawful or unlawful by him while Al-Zuhrî wrote everything he came to know [Al-Jâmi, p.37]. Ibn Kaisân, another contemporary of Al-Zuhrî, says that he took down only the sayings and doings of the Prophet ﷺ, while Al-Zuhrî insisted on recording everything about the Prophet’s ﷺ companions too. “For he considered that everything pertaining to the companions was a part of *sunnah*,” adds Ibn Kaisân, “he was crowned with success while I came to nothing.” [Al-Tabaqât, II, ii, p.135; Taqyîd, p.107]

Muhammad b. Muslim b. Shihâb Al-Zuhrî, whose writings were acquired by the government after the fall of Umayyads on the death of Caliph Walîd b. Yazîd (126/743), was only one of the hundreds of his learned compatriots who had applied themselves to the task of collecting traditions. He was born in 50 A.H. (670 C.E.) and died in 124 A.H. (741 C.E.). A Quraishi by descent, he was a keen and diligent student. The trouble he took to collect everything about the Prophet’s ﷺ life is fully substantiated by the testimony of his colleagues. It is related that he used to meet every *Ansâri* in Madînah and ask him to relate whatever incident of the Prophet’s ﷺ life was known to him. He thus met every one whom he could approach, men, women, old and young, and recorded full, complete and comprehensive statements after their verification, with the names of informants. This was the time when a large number of the Prophet’s ﷺ companions were still alive, and he profited from all of them. Similarly, he had numerous disciples whom he taught and dictated his traditions. Al-Zuhrî’s life is only illustrative of the great interest shown in the recording and compilation of *ahâdîth* in his time, for many other young men besides him had wholeheartedly applied themselves to the task.

That the compilation of *hadîth* literature was taken up by *tâbi’în*, i.e. the sons and disciples of the Prophet’s ﷺ companions. But there has been a widespread misunderstanding amongst the people not well versed with the science, such as, the orientalisists. They deduce from it that since many companions remained alive by the closing decades of the first century after *Hijrah* the compilation of *hadîth* by the *tâbi’în* would have been initiated in the second century of the Islâmic era. [For a detailed account of the writings of *ahâdîth* by the Prophet’s ﷺ companions and those of their successors in the first century A.H., see pages 34-106 of ‘*Studies in Early Hadîth Literature*’ by Dr. M. M. Azami.] This is far from truth. *Tâbi’în* are the persons who did not have the opportunity of the Prophet’s ﷺ company, but who had conversed and were associated with the companions of the Prophet ﷺ. As already stated, the term applies even to those persons who had been born during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ but were either too young or could not somehow wait upon the Apostle ﷺ, or were born immediately after his death. Thus every such person born around 11 A.H., when the Prophet ﷺ left this fleeting world, would be known as a *tâbi’ee*. The era of *tâbi’în*, thus, begins immediately after the Prophet’s ﷺ demise in 11 A.H., or even earlier, and not a hundred years thereafter. It is also a fallacy to think that the *tâbi’în* took up compilation of *hadîth*

literature after a hundred years, when all the companions of the Prophet ﷺ had left the world. The period after the death of the Prophet ﷺ to the end of the first century after *Hijrah* is contemporaneous with the *tâbi'în*'s period, for none could claim that honor after every companion of the Prophet ﷺ had bidden farewell to this world. It would now be clear how grievously mistaken are they who claim that the compilation of *hadîth* literature was started a hundred years after the Prophet's ﷺ death.

The period during which collection and compilation of the traditions and the related historical data was completed can be divided into three parts. The first extends to the period when the people having first-hand information themselves collected the whole data. Then comes the period when a number of persons took upon themselves the collection and recording of these eye-and-ear-witness accounts by contacting the companions possessing this first-hand information. Finally, in the third phase, the writing of the treatises existing today was taken up. The duration of the first phase stretches, more or less, up to the close of the first century after *Hijrah*; the second lasts up to 150 A.H.; and the third extends from 150 A.H. to the opening decades of the fourth century. Thus the first phase coincides with the time of the Prophet's ﷺ companions and elders among the *tâbi'în*, the second with the younger *tâbi'în* and the disciples of the elder *tâbi'în*, and the third was the period when the traditionists like Muhammad b. Isma'îl al-Bukhârî, Muslim b. Al-Hajjâj al-Qushairi, Muhammad b. 'Îsa Tirmidhî, and Ahmad b. Muhammad ibn Hanbal wrote their works after examining thoroughly the then available material. It would also be clear from what has been explained here that the *hadîth* material collected in the first phase, that is, by the Prophet's ﷺ companions and elder *tâbi'în* was incorporated in the writings of the second phase, and this was in turn utilized for the compilation of dissertations in the third phase. We still have the written record of the second and third phases which is the most precious, authentic and trustworthy material possessed by history. No other historical material of past events extant today is so methodical, continuous and reliable as the *hadîth* literature.

My revered teacher, the late 'Allama Shibli, who was also a historian of repute, used to say that almost every other nation had had to record its oral traditions, very often after an interlude of centuries between the happenings and their being put into writing, for the compilation of its history. What they normally did in almost every case was to jot down every prattle and gossip without caring to know the sources of those stories. Thereafter probable events were selected by historians through the process of elimination of the incredible reports, and this is how the history of every nation has come to be written. The ancient annals of the European nations are no exception.

The criterion for historicity set by the Muslims was much more severe, however. Its first principle was that the initial narrator of any event, from whom a narration was handed down, should be an eyewitness to the happening recounted by him. Similarly, if there was a chain of narrators who have transmitted the information from one person to another, the characters and antecedents of each should be fully known. [Purporting to be scientific and applying the so-called historical method some Western scholars like Schacht have claimed that the *isnâd* i.e. the transmitting links of the *ahâdîth* were forged later on. Apart from the fact that these scholars normally take up the books of history or jurisprudence— by no means a right field for the study of *isnâd*— instead of the *hadîth* literature, their theory of “projecting back” of the *isnâd* is refuted by their own studies which show a number of transmitters belonging to scores of provinces giving the same

isnâd for a particular tradition. For a detailed examination of the subject see chapter VI of *Studies in Early Hadîth Literature*.) It required the scholars to satisfy themselves about the moral conduct, intelligence and reliability of each intervening narrator. It was, of a fact, a Herculean task to find out all these details about hundreds of thousand persons who formed the chain in the transmission of *ahâdîth*, but the scholars devoted their lives to the task. They wandered from one city to another, met every one acquainted with the narrator of even one tradition and gathered all the requisite information about the transmitting links of *ahâdîth*. And, thus came into existence what is called the science of *asmâ-ur-rijâl*, or the dictionary of biographers, which sheds light on the lives of at least one hundred thousand persons connected, in any way, with the transmission of the Prophet's ﷺ traditions.

This was, however, the principle laid down for verification of the characters and reliability of the narrators. Rules were also framed for internal criticism and evaluation of the reports handed down by the narrators. These were meant to evaluate, rationally, the correctness of the content of every narration. However, the scholars gave foremost priority to the reliability of the narrators, and were so candidly honest in giving their verdicts about them that their endeavors should be deemed to form a shining chapter of the Islâmic history. Among the narrators of traditions, there were also kings and powerful potentates who ruled with an iron hand, but the scholars of *hadîth*, always fearless, accorded them the place they rightfully deserved only by virtue of their personal character, piety and truthfulness. Imâm Wak'î was a traditionist whose father presided over the state exchequer. Wak'î used to accept traditions handed down by his father only when he found another reliable narrator to support his father, and rejected them if they were narrated by his father alone [*Al-Tahdhîb*, XI, p.30]. Mas'ûdi was another scholar of *hadîth* who was paid a visit by another scholar, Mu'âdh b. Mu'âdh, in 154 A.H. (770 C.E.), but since Mas'ûdi had to consult his writings in the course of narrating *ahâdîth*, Mu'âdh was not satisfied with his memory and had no hesitation in declaring him as untrustworthy [*Ibid*, VI, p.211]. On one occasion Mu'âdh b. Mu'âdh was offered ten thousand gold *dînars* merely for withholding evidence in regard to the reliability or otherwise of a certain person, but he turned down the offer contemptuously with the remark: "I can never conceal what is right." [*Ibid*, VI, p.231] Is there any example of similar candidness and veracity in the annals of other nations?

Strange though it may seem, this entire material of encyclopedic proportions, consisting of reports considered correct or incorrect, authentic or spurious by the scholars who accepted some and rejected others, is available even today for being sifted and evaluated by us in accordance with the principles laid down for their examination.

The discussion relating to the primary historical data of the Prophet's ﷺ biography, important though it might have appeared wearisome to you, has taken too much of the time of this lecture; nevertheless, the matter-of-fact nature of this record demonstrates how very methodical and verifiable is this material. Now let us explain what constitutes the extant sources for the biography of the Prophet of Islâm ﷺ and how were these put together. The first and the foremost source, which is most authentic and reliable is the Qur'ân itself whose veracity remains unchallenged even by the most inveterate enemies of Islâm. All the important facts about the life of the Prophet ﷺ, his character and deportment prior to his being invested with the mantle of prophethood, his poverty and orphanhood, his search for truth and bestowal of apostleship, the coming of revelations

and the announcement of his mission, his preaching of the faith and enmity of the infidels, his ascension and migration, his wars and conduct of peaceful negotiations, in short, every important fact and event of his life finds a reference in this Book which is peerless in its undisputed origin and genuineness.

The second major source is the great mass of traditions, numbering about a hundred thousand, inclusive of all the correct as well as the so-called incorrect reports. [See note at the end of this chapter.] Out of these were compiled the *Sihâh* or the six authentic books of *ahâdîth* after careful sifting and evaluation of each report according to the historical and subjective canons of criticism. There are also other compilations known as *musnads*, the largest of which is the *al-Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal consisting of six voluminous parts of about 500 pages each printed in small Egyptian type. It lists separately all the authentic traditions pertaining to the Prophet ﷺ and handed down by various companions and throws a floodlight on the life and character of the Prophet ﷺ.

The journals of the battles fought by the Prophet ﷺ, known as *maghâzî*, constitute the third important source for the biographies of the Prophet ﷺ. Written mainly to record the events relating to expeditions and battles, these contain many interesting details not found elsewhere. The oldest books of *maghâzî* were written by ‘Urwah b. Al-Zubair (d. 94/712), Muhammad b. Muslim b. Shihâb al-Zuhrî (d. 124/741), Mûsa b. ‘Uqbah (d.141/758), Ibn Is’hâq (d. 150/767) Ziyâd al-Bakâ’î (d. 182/798) and Muhammad b. ‘Umar al-Wâqidî (d. 207/825).

Fourthly, the books of history associated with the life and times of the Prophet ﷺ are an invaluable source for the biographers. The more reliable, as well as detailed ones, are the annals known as the *Al-Tabaqât* of Ibn Sa’d (d. 230/844), the celebrated *Târîkh ar-Rasûl Wal Mulûk* by Muhammad b. Jarîr Al-Tabarî (d. 310/923) and two more works of Al-Bukhârî entitled *Al-Târîkh al-Kabîr* and *Al-Târîkh al-Saghîr*. To this category of early historical works also belong the annals written by Ibn Hibbân and Ibn Abî Khuthaima (d.99/717) of Baghdad.

The works describing the miracles and spiritual attainments of the Prophet ﷺ, known as *kutub-i-dalâ’il*, have been compiled by a number of scholars. The notable among these, which also form a source material for the Prophet’s ﷺ biographical accounts, are the two *Dalâ’il an-Nubûwât* by Ibn Qutaibah (d.276/889) and Abû Is’hâq Harabî (d. 255/868), the *Dalâ’ils* of Imâm Baihaqî (d. 430/1038), Abû Nu’aim Isbahânî (d. 430/1038), Al-Mustaghfarî (d. 432/1040) and Abul Qâsim Isma’îl Isbahânî (d.535/1140), and, finally, the *Khasâis-ul-Kubrâ*, a more detailed dissertation by Imâm Suyûtî.

Yet another category of works containing a rich treasure of biographical data relating to the Prophet ﷺ are the books known as *shamâ’il*, for these are exclusively meant to portray the morals, habits, manners and character of the holy Prophet ﷺ of Islâm. The first and the best known among these is the *Al-Shamâ’il* of Muhammad b. ‘Isâ Tirmidhî (d. 279/892) on which scores of commentaries were later written by reputed scholars. Another scholarly and voluminous work is *Al-Shifâ fi-Huqûq al-Mustafâ* written by Qâdi ‘Aiyâz. A commentary on it was written by Shahab Khafaji under the title of *Nasîm-ur-Riyâz*. Other treatises on the subject are *Shamâ’il an-Nabî* by Abûl ‘Abbâs Mustaghfarî (d.432/1040) and *Shamâ’il an-Nûr as-Sâte’y* by Ibn al-Muqrî (d.253/876) and *Safar al-Sa’âdah* by Mujd-uddîn Firozâbâdî (d.817/1414).

Finally, there are the books purporting to be annals of Makkah and Madînah which give, besides the chronicles of these cities, the conditions obtaining during the lifetime of

the Prophet ﷺ and similar other details. These constitute the seventh source for the Prophet's ﷺ biography. The oldest historical works of this nature are the *Akhbâr-i-Makkah* by Al-Azraqî (d. 223/837) and *Akhbâr-i-Madînah* by 'Umar b. Shaiba (d. 262/875). Two more works of the same name are by Fâkehî and Ibn Dhabâlâ.

This brief sketch of the historical records and sources of the biographical works about the Prophet ﷺ is sufficient to convince everybody, whether a friend or a foe, about the authentic character of this material. You would have noticed that the great traditionists of the past did not rely merely on the memories and oral reports but they also established study circles in the mosques and *madrasahs* for the study of traditions and the *maghâzî*. 'Âsim b. 'Umar b. Qatâdah (d. 121/737) was the grandson of one of the Prophet's ﷺ companions, Qatâdah Ansârî رضي الله عنه. He wrote books on *maghâzî* and *siyar* and also delivered lectures to a group of students in the mosque of Damascus by order of Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azîz. Actually, the number of the Prophet's ﷺ biographies written right from his own times to this day in different countries and languages would be several thousand. In Urdu alone there would be several hundred such monographs although its literary history does not go beyond two hundred years, at the most, and serious dissertations in this language actually came to be written only after the upheaval of 1857.

It is a cardinal principle of the Muslims' faith to pay homage to the illustrious Prophet ﷺ, but let us now turn our attention to the endeavors made by the followers of other religions to study the life of Muhammad ﷺ. A number of Hindus, Sikhs, Brahmo Samajis and others in India have written the biographies of the holy Prophet ﷺ. Europe has also had a long tradition, despite its hatred towards Islâm, of the studies undertaken in this field, even though these were more often taken up for serving the needs of evangelism or for historical and literary purposes. *Al-Muqtabas*, a literary magazine of Damascus, published a list of European works on the life of the Prophet ﷺ, some fifteen or sixteen years back, which listed thirteen hundred books. [This number should have at least been doubled during the past fifty or more years.] Prof. D.S. Margoliouth, who was a teacher of Arabic in the Oxford University, had written a biography of the Prophet ﷺ, which was published in the series of the Heroes of Nations in 1906. No exposition more hostile has ever been brought out with a confessedly Jewish bias by any other biographer of the Prophet ﷺ, at least in the English language, for the author has left no stone unturned to call out something from the original sources to distort everything connected with the life and teachings of Muhammad ﷺ, yet he had to acknowledge in his introduction to the book that-

“The biographers of the Prophet Mohammad (ﷺ) form a long series which it is impossible to end, but in which it would be honorable to find a place.” [*Mohammad and the Rise of Islâm*, New York (1906), p.1]

There is, also, a sympathetic Christian biographer John Devenport, who begins his biography of the Prophet ﷺ entitled *An Apology for Muhammad and the Qur'ân* [published from London in 1869] with an acknowledgement of the fact that “of all the law-makers and conquerors there is not one the events of whose life are more true and more detailed than those of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)”.

R. Bosworth Smith, late Fellow of Trinity College of Oxford, delivered a series of lectures on 'Mohammad and Mohammadanism' under the auspices of the Royal Institution of Great Britain in February and March 1874. He says in his lectures which were later on enlarged and published under the same title:

“And, what is true of religion generally, is also true, unfortunately, of those three religions which I have called, for want of a better name, historical— and of their founders. We know all too little of the first and earliest laborers; too much, perhaps, of those who have entered into their labors. We know less of Zoroaster and Confucious than we do of Solon and Socrates; less of Moses and Buddha than we do of Ambrose and Augustine. We know indeed some fragments of a fragment of Christ’s life: but who can lift the veil of the thirty years that prepared the way for the three? What we do know indeed has renovated a third of the world, and may yet renovate much more; an ideal of life at once remote and near; possible and impossible, but how much we do not know! What do we know of his mother, of his home life, of his early friends, of his relation to them, of the gradual dawning, or, it may be, the sudden revelation, of his divine mission? How many questions about him occur to each of us which must always remain questions?

“But in Mohammanism. everything is different; here instead of shadowy and the mysterious we have history. We know as much of Muhammad (ﷺ) as we do even of Luther and Milton. The mythical, the legendary, the supernatural is almost wanting in the original Arab authorities, or at all events can easily be distinguished from what is historical. Nobody here is the dupe of himself or of others; there is the full light of day upon all that light can ever reach at all.” [*Mohammad and Mohammadanism*, p.16, 18]

The Muslims have written innumerable biographies of their Prophet ﷺ, and are still writing more of them. It would be no exaggeration to claim that each one of these is more detailed, more reliable and based on more authentic historical records than that of any other prophet or founder of religion written by his followers. This is a continuing process: each generation has studied afresh the original sources, traditions and ear-and-eye-witness reports, shed fresh light on the Prophet’s ﷺ life, and passed on the fruits of its labor to the succeeding generation. *Muwatta*, the first compilation of traditions was learnt by 400 persons from its author, Mâlik b. Anas, and his disciples included rulers as well as scholars, legists as well as litterateurs. Sixty thousand persons had attended the discourses of Al-Firabrî, lecturing on the *Sahîh* of his mentor, Al-Bukhârî. Were similar arrangements ever made for propagating the teachings and biographical data of any other founder of religion? Was the biography of any other prophet transmitted, preserved and compiled with the same care? Who can claim this honor save Muhammad - ﷺ - on whom be peace and blessings of the Lord!

Note:

It would be relevant to mention here, briefly, the misunderstanding purposely created by almost every western orientalist. They are never weary of pointing out the large number of traditions rejected by the earlier scholars as a proof of the unreliability of the entire *hadîth* literature. It is contended for example, that the fact that Ibn Hanbal selected 30,000 out of 750,000 traditions and Al-Bukhârî had made his collection from a collection of six hundred thousand, shows that it was all a mass of forgeries and dubious reports. [*c.f.* A. Guillaume, *Islâm*, Penguin series, pp. 66, 91; Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, London (1894) Vol. I p. xxxvii, R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge (1962). p. 146; HAR Gibbs *Mohammadanism*, London (1964), p.79]. The problem, so puzzling to the orientalists, is, however, more an evidence of their slipshod

approach to the science than the unauthenticity of the traditions. The traditions do not include only the utterances, deeds and tacit approval of the acts done in the presence of the Prophet ﷺ but they also cover similar reports in regard to the companions and their successors. Then, every single report transmitted through different channels of narrators, which sometimes run to a hundred or more [c.f. Mustafa Siba'i, *Al-Sunnah wa Makânatuhâ fi al-Islâm*, Cairo (1390/1961), p. 224], is counted as a separate *hadîth* for purposes of its evaluation. It is, thus, not at all surprising if about 10,000 reports handed down by about 4,000 companions of the Prophet ﷺ were multiplied into several hundreds of thousand narrations by the scholars in order to facilitate their scrutiny. Naturally, if a traditionist selects a particular *hadîth* as authentic because of its more trustworthy narrators, and rejects the reports of other narrators containing almost or even exactly the same narration, it does not mean that all the other reports rejected by him are 'unauthentic' or 'spurious'. In fact, Al-Bukhârî or any other compiler of *ahâdîth* never claimed that what had been left out by him was spurious or lacked authenticity. According to the criteria laid down for the criticism of traditions, the traditionists first make a search about the *isnâd* or chain of narrators of a report, and if it falls short of their stern criteria of historical criticism they call it defective, without any further scrutiny of the subject matter. Dr. Muhammad Mustafa 'Azami has given in his *Studies in Early Hadîth Literature*, a collection of traditions, transmitted by Bishr b. al-Husain on the authority of Zakariyâ b. 'Adi from Anas b. Mâlik رضي الله عنه, from the Prophet ﷺ, (pp. 305-310). It has traditions rejected as unreliable, though about one quarter of these traditions handed down by other narrators are found in Bukhârî's and Muslim's *Sahîh* collections. In other words, Bukhârî and Muslim have accepted identical reports with more satisfactory *isnâd*. The only reason for discarding these traditions was that one of the narrators, Zakariyâ, did not hear them himself from Anas رضي الله عنه. Even though the reports of Zakariyâ were supported or corroborated by other channels, these were not accepted by the traditionists for they fell short of their canons of historical criticism. Actually, the matter cannot but impress an honest scholar and strengthen his trust and reliance on the books of *ahâdîth*, but nothing can convince those who more often deliberately mistranslate the reports and then produce them as an evidence of the unauthentic character of the *ahâdîth*. It is also equally surprising that modern Western writers hardly ever pay any attention to the researches exploding these charges and go on repeating them *ad nauseam*, without least regard to their pretensions of unbiased and sympathetic approach to Islâm.

Chapter Four

Perfection

Perfection is the test of an ideal life. Historicity of any character is, however, not the criterion of perfection, although it is absolutely essential to have solid and complete knowledge about the life and conduct of a perfect guide and an ideal mentor.

The life of Muhammad ﷺ, from his birth to death, is before us like an open book. His companions knew him in full and they also took care to transmit whatever they knew about him to the posterity. There was never a time, howsoever short, that the Prophet ﷺ had spent in seclusion, away from the gaze of his contemporaries. We know about his birth and childhood, his boyhood and youth, his trade, his behavior with his friends, his marriage, his participation in the battle of the Quraish and the treaty thereafter, his earning the title of ‘trustworthy’, installation of the black stone of Ka’bah by him, his meditations and prayers in the cave of Hira, the coming of revelations, birth of Islâm, his preachings and opposition by the Makkans, his wanderings in Ta’if, his ascension to the Heaven and migration to Madînah, his incursions and battles, the treaty of Hudaibia concluded by him, his epistles to the kings and rulers of surrounding countries, his farewell pilgrimage, the completion of revelation and his death, in short, there is nothing of his life that is not known to the world. All of it was put into writing: even what was known to be ambiguous was also preserved by his followers so that the coming generations might themselves be able to decide what was acceptable or not. One might ask: “Why were the traditions known to be weak or untrustworthy preserved at all by the early traditionists? What was the wisdom behind it?” Really, it was not without purpose, for they did not want to be accused of suppressing unfavorable reports about their Prophet ﷺ- a criticism pertinently applied to the Christian Gospels. This was the proof of their genuine candor and faith in the strength of their Prophet’s ﷺ character.

The traditions do not hide anything about the Prophet ﷺ. The manner of his speaking, sitting, lying, sleeping, dressing and walking; his marriages, wives, children, friends and followers; his engagements in camps and cantonments; his prayers in the mosque and command of armies in the battlefields; his habits, likes and dislikes; even his dealings with his wives in privacy-everything can be found here as plain as day. To be more exact, let us quote here the headings of the chapters of the *Shamâ’il* of Muhammad b. ‘Isâ Tirmidhî, a book on the appearance, habits and character of the Prophet ﷺ:

Chapter

1. Prophet’s ﷺ appearance and features.
2. His hair.
3. His combs.
4. His gray hairs.
5. His hair-dye.
6. His use of Collyrium.
7. His dress.
8. His daily routine.
9. His stockings.
- 10 His shoes.
11. His finger ring.

12. His sword.
13. His chain armor.
14. His helmet.
15. His turban.
16. His pair of trousers.
17. His gait.
18. His covering of the face with cloth.
19. The manner of his sitting.
20. His bedding and pillow.
21. His reclining against the pillow.
22. His habits in eating.
23. His manner of taking bread.
24. His manner of taking soup and meat.
25. His way of ablution.
26. His invocations before and after taking meals.
27. His bowls and cups.
28. Fruits taken by him.
29. On his drinks.
30. How he drank.
31. His use of perfumes.
32. His way of talking.
33. His manner of reciting verses from the Qur'ân.
34. His narration of stories.
35. His way of sleeping.
36. His way of praying.
37. His way of smiling.
38. His wit and humor.
39. His morning prayers.
40. His voluntary prayers at home.
41. His fasts.
42. His recital of the Qur'ân.
43. His lamentations at prayer.
44. His beddings.
45. His hospitality.
46. His politeness.
47. Trimmings of his hair.
48. His names.
49. His mode of living.
50. His age.
51. His death.
52. His bequest.

These are the topics discussed, briefly or in detail, describing every aspect of his life. Whether he was in the midst of his wives and children, or among his friends and followers, every moment of his life was reported and recorded.

Even the greatest of men are commoners in their own houses. That is why Voltaire once remarked that “no man is a hero to his valet.” But Voltaire’s dictum was reversed,

says Bosworth Smith, at least in the case of Muhammad ﷺ. A historian like Edward Gibbon vouches that “the first and the most arduous conquests of Mahomet were those of his wife, his servant, his pupil and his friend; since he presented himself as a prophet to those who were most conversant with his infirmities as a man.” [*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. V, p.351-52] With enthusiasm they all yielded to the voice of prophecy.

It cannot be gainsaid that nobody can be more aware of the weaknesses of a man than his own wife. And, is it not a fact that the first who believed in the mission of Muhammad ﷺ was Khadija رضي الله عنها, his own wife, who had been his companion for the last fifteen years? Was she not expected to know him inside out, but no sooner than did he make the claim to apostleship that she confirmed the veracity of his message.

But, this is not all. No man, howsoever great or truthful, can allow his wife to tell others everything she knows about him. Nobody can take this risk even if he has only one wife. The Prophet ﷺ, however, had nine wives, and he had permitted all of them to tell everyone whatever they saw of him doing in the light of the day or the darkness of the night. He had definitely asked them not to keep anything secret about him. Is there even one example of a similar self-confidence and moral courage exhibited by any man in any age?

All the books on traditions speak eloquently about the fine virtues and high morals of the Prophet ﷺ. However, of these one that deserves to be specially mentioned here is the *Kitâb al-Shifâ* of Qâdî ‘Ayâz Andalûsi. A European orientalist once told me, during my visit to France, that it would be sufficient to render Qâdî ‘Ayâz’s *Al-Shifâ* in one of the European languages for acquainting the Westerners with the moral virtues of the holy Prophet ﷺ. Of a fact the information available today about the character and morals of the Prophet ﷺ can be gauged from the sub-headings of the chapter on ‘Character’ of the Prophet ﷺ, in my own book entitled *Sîrat-un-Nabî*. These are: His countenance, the Seal of Prophethood [a large mole on the Prophet’s ﷺ back which is said to have been a divine sign of his prophetic office], his hair, gait, speech, smile and laughter, dress, finger-ring, chain-armor and helmet, the food relished by him and his manner of eating, his habits in eating, his liking for good dress, colors preferred and disliked by him, the perfumes used by him, his refined taste and fondness for riding.

The section dealing with the Prophet’s ﷺ daily routine covers his pursuits from morning till evening: sleep, prayer at night, habits in prayers, sermons, travels and holy wars, manner of consoling others, cordiality and general pursuits.

In regard to his assemblies the details given are about the conclave of the Prophet ﷺ, his sermon sessions, etiquette of the meetings, their timings, special gatherings of women, way of address, liveliness of pronouncements, influence on participants, manner of expression, nature and content of speeches and their effectiveness.

The captions dealing with the Prophet’s ﷺ worship are supplications, fasting, *zakât*, charity, pilgrimage, remembrance of God, ardor for the Lord’s companionship, prayers in the battlefield, awe of God, lamentations, love of God, reliance on God, endurance and thanksgiving.

The moral virtues of the Prophet ﷺ have been explained with the details about his character, perseverance, politeness, fair dealing, justice, generosity, selflessness, hospitality, aversion to begging and refusal to take alms, acceptance of presents, avoidance of obligations by others, non-violence, dislike for the show of piety, disdain of

flattery and fault-finding, simplicity, distaste for riches and ostentation, sense of equality, dislike for undue veneration and approbation, sense of modesty, doing of his work himself, fortitude, forbearance and forgiveness, pardoning of the pagans and enemies, kindness to unbelievers, treatment of the Jews and Christians, affection for the poor, prayers for the welfare of his foes, love for children, courtesy to women, kindness to animals, affection and mercifulness, kindheartedness, nursing the sick and consoling the bereaved, wit and humor, affection for his own children and treatment of his wives.

Hâfiz Ibn Qayyim has given in the *Zâd al-Ma'âd* even additional details about the personal bearing and deportment of the Prophet ﷺ, such as, his communications and correspondence, his marital life, his manner of sleeping and getting up, his way of riding, his manner of accepting slaves for his service, his dealings in sales and purchases, how he satisfied his physical needs, his growing and cropping of moustaches, his manner of speaking and keeping silence, lamenting and laughing, how he delivered his sermons, how he performed ablution, *masah* and *tayammum*, the way he offered prayers, performed prostrations and ended the prayers, his prayers in the mosque and at home, his vigils and orisons in the night, his manner of performing funeral prayers, his recitation of the Qur'ân, his charities, his fasts at home and in travels and the fasts in the month of Ramadhan and on other days, his meditations and way of performing pilgrimage, his oblations, his performance of Friday prayers, how he performed the rite of '*aqîqa* of new born babies as also naming and circumcision of children, the way he entered a house after seeking permission, his invocations before and after meals and on sighting the new moon, how he saluted and invoked blessings on others, the way he set off for travels, his method of solemnizing marriages, his dislike for harsh language, how he treated the captives, spies and hypocrites, his dealings with the followers of revealed religions and unbelievers and his method of treating certain ailments.

The list of subjects treated by the authors, some of which have been cited here, are merely illustrative of the details available about the life and character, conduct and behavior of the Prophet of Islâm ﷺ. They show how meticulously every incident, great or small, important or insignificant relating to the Prophet's ﷺ life has been preserved, leaving nothing more to be desired. These details also show, by the same token, what the perfection of any character really means and how the Prophet of Islâm ﷺ stands apart from all other founders of religions in having a complete and exhaustive record of every aspect of his life and character preserved for the benefit of posterity.

It is no less significant that the Prophet of Islâm ﷺ had given definite instructions to his followers that whatever they saw of him, saying or doing, amongst them or alone, in the mosque or in the battlefield, leading the prayers or conducting wars, on the pulpit or in a closet, should invariably be brought to the notice of others. His wives, as a consequence, freely talked about his private affairs while seventy of his followers lived close to his house in his mosque to learn all about him. These companions earned their living by selling firewood collected from the forest or similar other trades, but they had arranged between themselves to leave a party always in attendance of the Prophet ﷺ so that nothing escaped their attention. One out of these seventy was Abû Huraira رضي الله عنه, who is credited with the transmission of the largest number of traditions or reports about the Prophet ﷺ. There were also the inhabitants of Madînah besides these seventy companions, who attended congregational prayers led by the Prophet ﷺ, five times a day, for ten long years. All of them had the opportunity of observing his actions, habits and

customs. Then, there were occasions when even larger numbers gathered round the Prophet ﷺ. In the expedition for the capture of Makkah, ten thousand Muslims accompanied the Prophet ﷺ while their number was thirty thousand in the battle of Tabûk and one hundred thousand during the Farewell Pilgrimage. Everybody knew that it was his bounden duty to tell others whatever he came to know about the Messenger of Allâh. Nothing about his life from the closet of his sleeping chamber to the market place, thus, ever remained a secret, and everything of it was handed down from generation to generation. But, all this abundance of reports about him notwithstanding, even his most inveterate enemies could never bring up any charge against him except polygamy and the holy wars waged by him. Which will you call a spotless and virtuous life—that of Muhammad, the Prophet ﷺ, or the life of those already shrouded in mystery?

One more aspect of Muhammad's ﷺ life needs attention. He was not always surrounded by his devoted followers. He spent the first forty years of his life with the Quraish in Makkah. He had his business dealings with them which is a sure test of one's honesty and trustworthiness. How he acquitted himself in these transactions, when he was still a youth, is illustrated by the fact that he won the title of the *Amîn* or Trustworthy from the Makkans. Even after he was favored with the revelation from on High, those who opposed his claim to prophethood had such a trust in his honesty that they entrusted their valuables to his safekeeping. It is a well-known fact that the Prophet ﷺ had to leave behind 'Ali ﷺ, on the occasion of his migration to Madînah, for returning several of these goods to their owners. The whole of Makkah had stood up against the Prophet ﷺ, boycotted and heaped invectives upon him, thrown rubbish and stones on him, made plans to kill him and accused him of being an enchanter and a poet and a lunatic, but none ever dared bring his character and morals in question. Does not the claim to divine apostleship mean a claim to innocence and unblemished character? Would have not a few instances of his immoral behavior been sufficient to refute his claim to prophethood? Why was it that the Quraish spent their wealth and put their own lives at stake but they never framed any charge to blemish his character? Does this not prove that the Prophet ﷺ was as much above reproach in the eyes of his foes as he was to his followers?

Once all the leading men of the Quraish had assembled to talk about the problem posed by the Prophet's ﷺ defiance of pagan gods. Al-Nadr b. al-Hârith, the more experienced among them, got up and said: "O Quraish! A situation has arisen which you cannot deal with. Muhammad ﷺ was a young man most liked amongst you, most truthful in speech and most trustworthy, until, when you saw gray hairs on his temple, and he brought you a message, you said he was a sorcerer, a diviner, a poet and was possessed, but, by Allâh! there is nothing of this sort in Muhammad ﷺ for I have heard him speaking and preaching." [*Ibn Hishâm*, p.191]

None was a greater enemy of the Prophet ﷺ than Abû Jahl, but he once said to him: "Muhammad, I do not call you a liar, but I do not think that whatever you preach is correct." It was on this occasion that the revelation came-

"We know well how their talk grieveth thee, though in truth they deny not thee (Muhammad), but evil-doers flout the revelations of Allâh. [Qur'ân 6:33]

When the Prophet ﷺ was commanded to announce the truth he had received, he climbed the top of a hill and called out the Quraish. After they had all gathered round him, he asked them: "What would you think, if I were to tell you that the enemy is lying

in ambush behind this hillock to attack you?” The reply he received was, “Oh yes! For we have never heard you speaking a lie.” [Tirmidhî, “Tafsîr Sûrah al-An’âm”]

After the envoy of the Prophet ﷺ had delivered his message to the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, the latter called for Abû Sufyân, a sworn enemy of the Prophet ﷺ, who had been arraying his forces against him for the last six years, for making enquiries about the man who had dared to address him. An enemy was thus called to vouch for his bitterest foe whom he wanted to destroy at any cost. Abû Sufyân also knew that if he could somehow provoke the passions of the powerful Emperor against his adversary, the Roman legions could devastate Madînah in a couple of days. But this was the conversation that passed on between the two:

Heraclius first demanded: “Tell me about his lineage amongst you.”

“It is pure,” replied Abû Sufyân, “our best lineage.”

“Has any of his house made the same claim earlier?” asked Heraclius again.

“No.” replied Abû Sufyân.

Heraclius now demanded again, “Did anybody possess sovereignty in his family?”

Abû Sufyân had again to say “No” in reply.

Now Heraclius put another question: “What sort of men are those who have accepted his religion? Are they poor or influential people?”

“Weak and helpless,” replied Abû Sufyân.

Heraclius asked again, “Is the number of his followers increasing or decreasing?”

“Increasing,” Abû Sufyân had to acknowledge in reply.

“Has he ever told you a lie?”, demanded the Emperor.

Abû Sufyân again replied in the negative and then Heraclius enquired, “Has he ever been treacherous?”

“No,” said Abû Sufyân in reply, but added, “But we will see what he does in future.”

“And what does he teach you” was the last question asked by Heraclius.

“He asks us,” replied Abû Sufyân, “to worship only One God, to offer prayers, to become virtuous, to speak the truth and to discharge our obligations to the kinsmen.” [Ibn Is’hâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p.655]

Does Muhammad ﷺ need any more proof in support of the perfection of his character? Was such a conclusive evidence ever produced for anyone’s enemy?

But, there is something more about Muhammad ﷺ that catches the eye. Those who first found credence in the call of Muhammad ﷺ were neither the fishermen of a subject race nor the despised slaves of a Pharaoh: they belonged to a free and proud race, never subjected to alien rule in their memory. Known for their pragmatism, they were the people who had commercial dealings with Iran, Syria and Asia Minor. They have left their marks, still visible today, as a keen, intelligent and sagacious people. They produced military generals comparable to the greatest of conquerors, fought valiantly against forces many times their numbers and acquitted themselves well as rulers of vast and populous lands. Can anybody feign that the men who had proved the strength of their arms and intellect had remained ignorant of the true character of their own guide and teacher? Was it ever possible to dupe such a people? Rather, they were the people who followed in the footsteps of their mentor with the greatest enthusiasm and took every possible step to

preserve the memory of their beloved master. This is, of a fact, an incontrovertible sign of the perfection of Muhammad's ﷺ character.

The Prophet ﷺ never tried to hide anything about him. He was known to all as he was. His wife 'Ayesha رضي الله عنها, who had been his closest companion for nine years, relates: "Never believe one who says that Muhammad ﷺ had suppressed any commandment of God, for God Himself attests:

"The duty of the messenger is only to convey (the message). Allâh knoweth what ye proclaim and what ye hide." [Al-Sahîh, "Tafsîr Sûrah al-Mâ'idah" (5:99)]

Nobody ever wants to reveal his weaknesses— and spiritual and moral preceptors the least of all. Still, the Qur'ân has several verses admonishing the Prophet ﷺ on his apparent mistakes. Each of these verses was read out to others by him, memorized by the people and has ever since been recited in the mosques and the homes. Had these verses not alluded to the Prophet's ﷺ mistakes, the world would have never come to know at least some of them. But these were pointed out by Allâh, for this was the character to be presented in the full light of day as the prototype of all human perfection.

The marriage of the Prophet ﷺ with the divorced wife of his adopted son was an act detestable to the Arabs. Yet the incident has been described at length in the Qur'ân. 'Ayesha رضي الله عنها says that if the Prophet ﷺ had the option to suppress any verse of the Qur'ân, he would certainly have not divulged these to avoid criticism [Al-Musnad, VI, p.233]. The very fact that the Prophet ﷺ gave out even these verses testifies that nothing about his life and character remains in the dark.

It may be useful to recall here the attestation of Bosworth Smith, who writes:

"There is full light of day upon all that that light can ever reach at all. 'The abysmal depths of personality' indeed are, and must always remain, beyond the reach of any line and plummet of ours. But we know everything of the external history of Muhammad ﷺ— his youth, his appearance, his relations, his habits; the first idea and the gradual growth, intermittent though it was, of his great revelation; while for his internal history, after his mission had been proclaimed, we have a book absolutely unique in its origin, in its preservation, and in the chaos of its contents, but on the substantial authenticity of which no one has ever been able to cast a serious doubt. There, if in any book, we have a mirror of one of the master spirits of the world; often inartistic, incoherent, self-contradictory, dull, but impregnated with a few grand ideas which stand out from the whole; a mind seething with the inspiration pent within it, 'intoxicated with God', but full of human weaknesses, from which he never pretended- and it is his lasting glory that he never pretended- to be free." [Mohammad and Mohammadanism, pp.17-18]

Bosworth Smith further goes on to say:

"It has been remarked by Gibbon that no incipient Prophet ever passed through so severe an ordeal as Muhammad ﷺ, since he first presented himself as a Prophet to those who were most conversant with his infirmities as a man. Those who knew him best, his wife, his eccentric slave, his cousin, his earliest friend— he, who, as Muhammad ﷺ said, alone of his converts, 'turned not back, neither was perplexed'- were the first to recognize his mission. The ordinary lot of a Prophet was in his case reversed; he was not without honor save among those who did not know him well." [Ibid, p.127]

The more intimately one knew the Prophet ﷺ, the more one admired him. The men who first placed trust in the mission of prophets before Muhammad ﷺ were those who knew least about them, and their friends and relations were the last to follow them. But the case was entirely different with Muhammad ﷺ. He first won the allegiance of those who were closest to him, knew him intimately and had a personal experience of his dealings, conduct and behavior. What is more, all of them had to pass through a grueling test as well. Khadija رضى الله عنها, the Prophet's wife, had to endure the rigors of a boycott imposed by the Makkans for three long years when she had to live in the Shuy'ba Abû Tâlib. Abû Bakr رضى الله عنه had to accompany his mentor when the enemy thirsting for his blood, was looking into every nook and corner to lay his hands on the Prophet ﷺ. 'Ali رضى الله عنه had to sleep on the bed whose owner had been earmarked for assassination in the same night. Zaid رضى الله عنه was emancipated by his master, but he would rather prefer to live with his former owner than return home with his father.

Paying a tribute to the earnestness of the Prophet's ﷺ companions رضى الله عنهم Godfrey Haggins says that the Christians would do well to recollect that the doctrines of Muhammad ﷺ created a degree of enthusiasm in his followers which is to be sought in vain in the immediate followers of Jesus (اليسوع) — when Jesus was led to the Cross, his followers fled, their enthusiasm forsook them, they left him to perish... The followers of Muhammad ﷺ, on the contrary, rallied round their persecuted prophet, and, risking their lives in his defence, made him triumph over all his enemies [*An Apology for the Life of Mohammad*].

The Apostle of Allâh ﷺ was hemmed in from all sides by the enemy in the battle of Uhud. He called out: "Who will barter his life for me?" No sooner than did his followers hear the summon that seven of the *Ansârs* رضى الله عنهم rushed to defend the Prophet ﷺ and fought, man after man, and died like heroes [Ibn Is'hâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p.380-81]. An *Ansâri* woman lost her father, brother and husband in the same battle. She heard about the death of her nearest kins, one by one, but unmindful of her loss she continued to enquire: "Is the Prophet of God safe?" At last she was told that the Prophet ﷺ was alive; but not content with the news, she came herself to see the Prophet ﷺ and exclaimed:

"No calamity shall befall us so long thou art alive.
My father, my husband, my brother and I myself,
All can be put at stake, my lord, for thy sake."

This was the love felt all too deeply by those who knew the Prophet ﷺ intimately. Would it be possible for anyone to sacrifice his life for another man unless he considers him a perfect model of cardinal virtues? This is the reason why Islâm presents the life of Muhammad ﷺ as a perfect model and an exemplar for the entire humanity and calls upon us to love him if we want to be loved by God.

"Say, (O Muhammad to mankind): *If ye love Allâh, follow me; Allâh will love you.*
[Qur'ân 3:31]

To follow the Prophet ﷺ is, then, the test of one's love for God. It is easy to burn oneself in a moment like a moth, but it is extremely difficult to follow in the footsteps of a guide assiduously until one's hour is come. It was a very severe ordeal, no doubt; but it was passed through with flying colors by every companion of the Prophet ﷺ. This had become the goal of their lives: an ideal which made the Prophet's ﷺ companions and their disciples assume the role of biographers, chroniclers and historians. They made it a

great task of their lives to find out each and everything about their beloved Prophet ﷺ and preserve it for the coming generations. This, in itself, is a proof of the perfection of the Prophet's ﷺ life and character in the eyes of his immediate successors. Nothing else would have engaged their attention so thoroughly.

For Islâm holds up the life of the holy Prophet ﷺ as a perfect model for every Muslim, in all its aspects and details. And, the fact is that it has actually been so for the last one and a half thousand years, illuminating the path of countless believers over the ages. There is nothing in the dark, nothing missing – all that the Muslims needed to know of him for the edification of their souls was always found by them. A man whose life was so intimately known could have alone been held as a model guide, as an exemplar and as a sinless man of God by innumerable saints and savants, and hence the verdict of history also goes in his favor.

Babylon, Assyria, India, China, Egypt, Palestine and Greece have been the cradles of ancient civilizations. Ethical norms were set up by the great philosophers of these countries, rules and conventions were evolved for eating and drinking, food and dress, marriages and deaths, festivals and bereavements. These were elaborated over hundreds of years, but destroyed in no time. Islâm formulated the principles of its civilization in a couple of years, yet they continue to rule over the nations for thousands of years. They were found equally useful by all because they emanated from a single source- the life of the holy Prophet ﷺ. This was the model which had left a profound imprint upon the companions, patterned their lives and set the model for their successors, thus, making it the ideal way of life for the whole Islâmîc world. The sacred life of the Prophet ﷺ was the nucleus round which revolved the lives of his companions and subsequent generations. It was made a full circle by the peoples of different stocks joining in the perambulation. The civilization thus reared by the genius of different Muslim nationalities may differ to some extent and may also have some shortcomings, but the soul which runs through it is one, complete and wholesome. Wherever there may be Muslims, they would derive inspiration from the same gold mine. Let me illustrate it by an example.

Whenever any savage of the dark continent or even a civilized person living in India embraces Christianity, he is taught to imitate the culture of the materialistic West although he takes his spiritual lessons from the Gospels. But, whatever may be the stage of development of any nation accepting Islâm, it has to look to the same shining example for religion as well as culture, for morals as well as customs. The moment one enters the fold of Islâm, one finds the life of the Prophet ﷺ before him, pointing the way to be followed in different situations and circumstances. It is a living example, a mirror reflecting all the conditions and complexions of human life.

A Jew, who wanted to find fault with the Muslims, once said to a companion of the Prophet ﷺ, “Your Prophet teaches you everything, even trifling matters?” “Yes,” came the prompt reply, “Our Prophet teaches us even about cleansing after urination and excretion.” The Muslims are still proud of this noblest exemplar for all human beings: he is the heaven's gift, a standard by which every man can reform and reform his life and morals, body and spirit, behavior and conduct and habits and manners. The people having faith in Islâm need nothing beyond the standard set by the Prophet ﷺ for their cultural, moral and social progress. The Prophet's ﷺ life is the universal touchstone: it draws a distinction between the vice and the virtue, the good and the bad. For the world lacks

another exemplar like the Prophet ﷺ: he alone is the perfect model for the whole world.
May Allâh have peace and mercy on him.

Chapter Five

Comprehensiveness

“Say (O Muhammad to mankind): If ye love Allâh, follow me; Allâh will love you.”
[Qur’ân 3:31]

A cardinal principle of religion is to love God and make oneself worthy of the love and mercy of God. And, to achieve this great purpose, almost every religion teaches its votaries to follow the way shown by its founder. Islâm, however, raises the whole level of religious thought and action by placing the scripture, or the *Kitâb*, as well as the paradigm of its Prophet ﷺ, or his *sunnah*, before the believers for their guidance. The *Kitâb* stands for divine commandments revealed to show the Will of Allâh while the *sunnah* is the practical illustration furnished by the Prophet’s ﷺ life spent in conformity with that Will. The practice of the Prophet ﷺ is contained in its fullness in the traditions, or the *ahâdîth*, in order to direct and guide the seeker after truth on the path of religion to a deep and real spiritual experience.

No religion can have all of its followers belonging to the same class or profession. Divergence of views and leanings and differences in professions and callings are the compelling needs of our earthly life. The world has to have kings and rulers as well as serfs and subjects; the judges and the jurists for the administration of the law and commanders of armies for maintaining security of the realm; the poor and the rich, the mendicants and the warriors, the businessmen and the priests for keeping the wheels of life moving onwards. Everyone of these needs an exemplar who may show the right path to him in his own sphere of life. But, Islâm invites all of them to follow the example of its Prophet ﷺ. This, in other words, means that the life presented by it as a model for all of them has a precedent for every class and a practical example of ideal life in every field of diverse callings. The claim, by itself, illustrates the comprehensiveness of its model asked to be followed by all. For no affluent person can set an example to be followed by the poor, nor the poor for the rich, nor the ruler for the ruled, nor yet the ruled for the ruler, it was necessary to have a universal model, a comprehensive and abiding exemplar like a bouquet containing flowers of every tint and hue.

Apart from the diversity of classes and callings, the life of man consists of a wide range of moods and inclinations governing his actions in different situations and circumstances. We walk and sit, we eat and sleep, we laugh and weep, we give and take, we kill and get killed, in short, we act in different ways on different occasions. Sometimes we pay homage to Allâh, at others we engage in our business; we are often guests or act as hosts; and, for all these occasions we need a precedent to know the correct way of behavior suited for that occasion.

Besides the actions involving physical exertions, there are also those which relate to the head and heart of man and which we call sentiments. Our sentiments or impulsions are ever-changing; often we are pleased and at times we get angry and agitated; feelings of hope and dejection, of pleasure and affliction, and of success and failure are different states of mind which alternately take hold of us and influence our actions. The moderateness of these emotions holds the key to the best and correct behavior in all circumstances. Therefore, we need a model of practical morality who can show us how to exercise control over our inborn tendencies of extremism and excess. We require a

practical model to discipline our emotions and feelings, and such was the emblem of moderation who once lived in the city of Madīnah.

We have to be resolute, unwavering, courageous, patient, resigned, self-sacrificing, benevolent, and merciful according to different situations of life that we come across on different occasions. We need a practical example to regulate our behavior in each of these varied conditions. But, where are we to look for them except in Muhammad ﷺ? In Moses ﷺ we can see an intrepid leader but not a merciful preceptor; Jesus of Nazareth ﷺ can be a model of leniency and kindness, but he lacks the ardor that warms the blood of the weak and poor. Man needs both of these and has also to learn how to keep a correct balance between the two. He can find both these qualities perfectly tempered in a harmonious manner in the life of the Prophet of Islām ﷺ.

A model which can serve as a standard for every class of the people acting under different circumstances and states of human emotions will be found in the life of Muhammad ﷺ. If you are rich, there is the example of the tradesman of Makkah and the master of Bahrain's treasures; if you are poor, you can follow the internee of Shuy'ba Abī Tâlib and the émigré of Madīnah; if you are a king, watch the actions of the ruler of Arabia; if you are a vassal, look at the man enduring hardships imposed by the Quraish of Makkah; if you are a conqueror, look at the victor of Badr and Hunayn; if you have suffered a defeat, take a lesson from the one discomfited at Uhud; if you are a teacher, learn from the holy mentor of the school of *Suffah*; if you are a student, look at the learner who sat before Gabriel ﷺ; if you are a sermoner, direct your eyes to the discourser delivering sermons in the mosque at Madīnah; if you are charged to preach the gospel of truth and mercy to your persecutors, observe the helpless preacher explaining the message of Allāh to the pagans of Makkah; if you have brought your enemy to his knees, look at the conqueror of Makkah; if you want to administer your lands and properties, discover how the lands and groves of Bani al-Nadīr, Khaibar, and Fadak were managed; if you are an orphan, do not forget the child of Āminah and 'Abd Allāh left to the tender mercy of Halīmah; if you are young, see the character of Makkah's shepherd; if you have a traveling business, cast a glance at the leader of caravan under way to Basra; if you are a judge or arbiter, look at the umpire entering the holy sanctuary before the peep of dawn and installing Hajr-ul-Aswad in the Ka'bah, or the justice of peace in whose eyes the poor and the rich were alike; if you are a husband, study the behavior of the husband of Khadījah and 'Āyesha; if you are a father, go through the biography of Fâtima's father and grandfather of Hasan and Husain رضي الله عنهم; in short, whoever and whatever you may be, you would find a shining example in the life of the holy Prophet ﷺ to illuminate your behavior. He is the only beacon of light and guidance for every seeker after truth. If you have the life of the Prophet of Islām ﷺ before you, you can find the examples of all the prophets, Noah and Abraham, Job and Jonah and Moses and Jesus عليهم السلام. If the life and character of each prophet of Allāh were deemed to be a shop selling the wares of one commodity, that of Muhammad ﷺ would verily be a variety store where goods of every description can be had to suit the tastes and needs of all.

My friend, Hasan 'Alī, used to bring out a magazine named *Nūr-i-Islām* from Patna some thirty or forty years back. Once he had published in his journal the views of a Hindu friend of his about Muhammad ﷺ. In answer to the question why he held the Prophet of Islām to be the greatest and the most perfect of men ever born in the world and what opinion he held about Jesus ﷺ, this learned friend of Hasan 'Alī had replied that

Jesus ﷺ, in comparison to Muhammad ﷺ, appeared to be an innocent child, articulating sweet words before a man of wisdom. Asked to elucidate the reason for considering Muhammad ﷺ to be the greatest man, he had replied,

I find in his character such diverse and manifold qualities as it would be impossible to find in any other man whose biography has been preserved by history. He is a king having a whole country under his control but never claiming mastery over even his own self; ever taking pride in his being the serf of Allâh. He is the master of camel-loads of treasure getting into his capital from far and near, yet he is ever so poor that for months no fire is lighted in his own hearth, and he goes without a full meal for days together. Like a veteran campaigner he can defeat his enemies, fully armed and exceeding his none too well armed battlers, still he is so peace-loving that he has no hesitation in signing a treaty when thousands of his followers are ready to fight till death. He is a man so dauntless that he can set the whole of the Quraish at defiance, but is also so kindhearted that he never sheds a drop of blood. He is solicitous of the welfare of his own family, of the weak and the orphan, and of every wayward soul in Arabia; he is always care-worn about the salvation of every human being, but he is also indifferent to everything save the pleasure of his Lord. He never curses those who deride him, nor does he retaliate against those who persecute him; rather, he invokes divine blessings on those who bear malice against him; nevertheless, he never forgives the enemies of Allâh whom he always threatens with grievous punishment in the hereafter. When we begin to see him as a militant battler, he appears before us as an ascetic in vigils and prayers and when we find him making his debut as a brilliant conqueror, we are astonished to see in him the innocent divine messenger. Just when we want to call him the King of Arabia, we find him leaning on a leather pillow filled with date leaves. The day we see the booty of war piled up in the courtyard of his Mosque, we find his own family with absolutely nothing to satisfy the pangs of hunger. When we see him distributing the prisoners of war as serfs to the inhabitants of Madînah, we also see his daughter Fâtimah رضى الله عنها complaining of blisters on her hands and shoulders caused by driving the handmill and carrying water. After the half of Arabia submits to his authority, ‘Umar رضى الله عنه finds him lying on a rough mattress whose weavings have left their marks on his bare body. His house then contains nothing except a handful of oats and a leather jar. His frugal living makes ‘Umar رضى الله عنه burst into tears, who says “O Apostle of Allâh, is it not distressing to see the *Qaisars* [Caesars, the emperors of Byzantium] and the *Kisrâs* [Chosroes, the emperors of Iran] rejoicing in the luxuries of the world while the Messenger of Allâh has to live with these straitened means?” But he gets the reply: “‘Umar, would you not like that the *Qaisar* and the *Kisrâ* should choose this world and I the next?”

On the day Makkah fell to the arms of the Prophet ﷺ, Abû Sufyân رضى الله عنه, the Chief of Makkah and the greatest enemy of Islâm till recently, stood watching the stepping-in Muslim troops, waves after waves, with their tribal colors flying over their heads. Abû Sufyân رضى الله عنه got overawed and said to ‘Abbâs رضى الله عنه standing beside him: “‘Abbâs, your nephew has risen to be a great King!” “No,” replied ‘Abbâs رضى الله عنه, “not a king but a Prophet.”

‘Adî رضى الله عنه, the son of Hâtim, the famous chief of the tribe of Tay, was still a Christian when he called upon the Prophet ﷺ in Madînah for the second time. He

saw, on the one hand, the deference paid to the Prophet ﷺ by his devoted companions and, on the other, the preparations being made for the holy war. Unable to decide whether Muhammad ﷺ was a prophet or a king, he was still in two minds when he saw a slave girl coming to seek the Prophet's ﷺ advice in private. "Come on," he heard the Prophet ﷺ replying, "I'll go wherever you want." 'Adî ﷺ at once saw that no king could be so modest and unassuming. He threw away the cross hanging from his neck and embraced Islâm.

The instances just related are not mere fictions but actual facts. Only a character so comprehensive, so sweeping as to encompass the present and the future, the east and the west, and all the diverse situations of human life can provide light and guidance to all classes and groups of human beings. A great teacher is he who can illustrate right behavior in the fit of anger as well as on occasions demanding merciful charity; who can tell us how to be generous in adversity and brave and courageous in the state of helplessness; who can provide us with a practical example of being a man of the world as well as God-fearing; and, who can give us the glad tidings of both the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of Earth at one and the same time.

There may be people who might hold forgiveness and kindness to be the greatest of virtues. These two, in their opinion, are enough to attain the perfection of spirit; but can anybody assert that man has no other moral affection, feeling, and emotion? Do not emotions like anger, charity, love, hatred, greed, contentment, retaliation and forbearance play any part in shaping human behavior? He alone can claim to be a perfect guide who can tell us how to keep a happy mean between all these natural propensities. If anybody still persists that sublimity of prophetic character consists merely of kindness, charity, and forgiveness, let him also tell the world how long the followers of such a prophet were able to follow the example of their mentor? Innumerable Christian kings have wielded the scepter from Constantine to this day, but why could nobody ever enforce the teaching of his Savior as the law of the land? How can, then, the conduct of a prophet not followed by his own followers be recognized as a perfect norm to be followed by others?

Every prophet of Allâh came to guide us with some distinguishing feature of his own. Noah's ﷺ life presents the picture of righteous indignation against heathenism while Abraham ﷺ is the iconoclasm's fogleman. Moses ﷺ is the matrix of war, government, and legislation; Jesus ﷺ is the specimen of humility and charity, forgiveness and contentment; Solomon ﷺ is the symbol of royal splendor; Jonah ﷺ is an illustration of penitence and contrition; Joseph ﷺ displays the zeal for preaching the truth even in the dungeon; David's ﷺ Psalms sing of lamentation and God's glorification; Jacob ﷺ is the mirror of absolute reliance and resignation to the Will of God; but, all these characteristics have been rolled into one perfect model for the entire humanity in the life and character of Muhammad ﷺ. A tradition, although not very authentic, related by Khatîb Baghdâdî says that when Muhammad ﷺ was born a celestial voice was heard commanding the angels: "Take Muhammad from one land to another and to the depth of the ocean so that the whole world, every man and *jinn*, every beast and bird, and every sentient being may know his name and fame. Give him the morals of Adam, gnosis of Seth, courage of Noah, faithfulness of Abraham, eloquence of Ishmael, resignation of Isaac, oratory of Salih, wisdom of Lot, perseverance of Moses, endurance of Job, obedience of Jonah, fighting spirit of

Joshua, melody of David, love of Danial, esteem of Elias, chastity of John, and abstinence of Jesus and bathe him in the waters of their morals.” The writers who have quoted this tradition intended only to emphasize the comprehensiveness of Muhammad’s ﷺ character. This tradition illustrates the engaging qualities granted individually to each prophet of Allâh, but which were ultimately united in the person of the last and the most winsome amongst all of them.

The different aspects of the Prophet’s ﷺ life clearly indicate the comprehensiveness of his character. If you behold the Prophet ﷺ migrating from Makkah to Yathrib, your mind’s eye would surely recall Moses ﷺ running away from Egypt to Midian. The anchorite meditating in the cave of Hira had all the earmarks of the mendicant on Mount Sinai. The only difference between the two, if there was any, lay in the wakeful eyes of Moses ﷺ and the meditating mind of Muhammad ﷺ; the one had fixed his gaze on the exterior while the other was concentrating on the inner core of Ultimate Reality. Mark the striking similarity between the preacher summoning the Quraish on Mount Safâ and the sermonizer on the Mount of Olives. Behold the resemblance between the Commander of the faithful on the planes of Badr and Hunayn, Ahzâb and Tabûk and the Prophet leading the Israelites. The Prophet ﷺ foretelling the doom of the seven Makkan chiefs had the very appearance of Moses ﷺ cursing Pharaoh and his partisans who had rejected him after witnessing his miracles; but when Muhammad ﷺ raised his hands to invoke blessings on his enemies at Uhud, he bore a striking resemblance to Jesus ﷺ seeking prosperity of his foes. Were you to behold Muhammad ﷺ acting as a judge in the Mosque at Madînah or fighting the infidels, he would appear to have all the features of Moses ﷺ, but when you rivet your eyes upon him engaged in night long prayers and vigils, you would have a glimpse of Jesus ﷺ. If you hear him reciting the Qur’ân and glorifying the Lord, you would undoubtedly take him much the same as David ﷺ singing the Psalms; if you bring to your mind his triumphant entry into Makkah, you would see him very like Solomon ﷺ, and if you picture him in the confinement of Shuy’ba Abî Tâlib, you would find the very image of Joseph ﷺ languishing in the Egyptian prison.

Moses ﷺ brought the law that binds the Israelites, David ﷺ sang the praises and hymns of Allâh, and Jesus ﷺ illustrated piety and sound morality but Muhammad ﷺ combined all—the law-giver, the pious worshipper, and the paradigm of moral virtues. In words and letters, they all are described in the Qur’ân: in action, the character of Muhammad ﷺ presents a perfect and practical example of all of them.

There is yet another aspect of Muhammad’s ﷺ all-embracing character. Let it be illustrated by the two types of educational institutions found nowadays; first, the specialized college imparting instruction in technical and professional courses, and, secondly, the universities which cover all the different branches of learning. The institutions of the first category, viz. colleges for the teaching of medical science turn out specialists in only one branch, like the physicians, engineers, business executives, agricultural experts, etc. This is because the students taking admission to them are trained in only one branch of knowledge. It is, however, obvious that expertise in any one branch of knowledge, trade, or calling is not adequate to meet the various needs of society which needs all the different types of specialized vocations for its progress and balanced development. Were all of us to study a particular art or science and devote ourselves to the same pursuit, the world would come to a standstill, signaling

the breakdown of society. Thus, if all men were to become pious ascetics devoted to God, the human society would lose its social order instead of achieving perfection. Now let us judge the prophets by this standard.

“Wherefor ye shall know the tree by its fruits,” [Mt. 7:16] is a too well known saying of Jesus ﷺ. Likewise, the academies and their standards of education are known by their alumni. Now, if you direct your mind upon those academies whose revered teachers were the prophets of Allâh, you would find normally ten or twenty learners, occasionally the number rising to seventy, or a hundred, or a thousand disciples, but never exceeding ten or twenty thousand at the most. But, when you come to the last prophetic school you would see more than a hundred thousand pupils around the great mentor. If you go further, and try to find out who the schoolmen of earlier prophets were, where they lived and what they did, what their attainments, morals, and characters were and what improvement they brought about in the human society of their times, you are more likely to not get any answer to these questions. In the case of the last Prophet ﷺ, however, you will find the names and addresses, characters and achievements of all his disciples preserved in the pages of history. Likewise, all the religions lay a claim to the universality of their teachings without any barrier of nationality or country. But the claim can be accepted if it can be shown that the founders of those religions actually enlisted disciples belonging to other nations and races or they even invited those people to join their company irrespective of color and race and language, or that a few persons belonging to an alien people responded to their call. No prophet of the Old Testament invited any people beyond the borders of Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. In other words, the call of all the Israelite prophets was confined to the countries where they lived, or, to be more specific, their whole endeavor was limited to the guidance of the Children of Israel. So was the case with the ancient prophets of Arabia. Jesus Christ ﷺ slammed the doors of his seminary against the face of alien races, for he unequivocally proclaimed: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” [*Ibid*, 15:24]. He did not even consider it “meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to dogs,” [*Ibid*, 15:26] by preaching his Gospel to the non-Israelites. The great sages of Hinduism would have perhaps never thought of diffusing their teachings beyond the sacred land of Aryaverta [land of the Aryans, *i.e.* India]. Some of the Buddhist kings, undoubtedly, sent missionaries to other countries but we do not find anything of the kind in the life of the Buddha himself.

Let us now look towards the *alma mater* of the students of the unlettered teacher of Arabia. Who are the disciples here? They are Abû Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Alî, ‘Uthmân, Talhâ, and Zubayr belonging to the Quraish of Makkah; Abû Dharr and Anas come of the Ghifârî tribe living in Tahamah near Makkah; Abû Hurairah and Abû Tufail b. ‘Amr hail from Yemen and belong to the tribe of Aws; two more, Abû Mûsâ al-Ash’ari and Mu’âdh b. Jabal are from another tribe of Yemen; Dammâd b. Tha’labâ comes of the tribe of Azd; Banû Tamîm, another tribe, is represented by Khabbâb b. al-Aratt; Munqidh b. Habbân and Mundhir b. A’idh are the children of Banû ‘Abd al-Qais, a tribe of Bahrain; ‘Ubayd and Ja’far are the Chiefs of Oman; and Farwa b. ‘Amr is from Ma’ân near Syria. And, who is this Negro? He is Bilâl from Abyssinia. Here are also Suhayb, the Roman; Salmân, the Persian; Fîrûz from Dailama; and Sunjit and Markabûd from Iran - رضى الله عنهم -

The treaty of Hudaib, signed in 6 A.H./627 C.E. marks the beginning of an era of peace long cherished by Islâm. Quraish and the Muslims agreed not to attack one another and the right of the Muslims to preach their faith was recognized by the Makkans. What was the pursuit to which the Prophet ﷺ applied himself after securing peaceful conditions? He sent letters to the rulers, kings, and emperors of adjoining countries inviting them to join their faith in the Unity of Allâh. Dihya b. Khalîfa al-Kalbî took his letter to Caesar, who was Heraclius, King of Rome; ‘Abd Allâh b. Hudhâfa Sahrî went with credentials to Chosroes of Iran; Hâtib b. Abû Balta’ to the Muqawqis, ruler of Alexandria; ‘Amr b. Umayya to Negus, the King of Abyssinia; Shujâ’ b. Wahb al-Asadî to Hârith b. Abû Shimr al-Ghassâni, the lord of Syria; and Sâlit b. ‘Amr to the chiefs of Yamâma.

The letters sent by the Prophet of Islâm ﷺ, unique in the history of religions, furnish a conclusive evidence, if one were needed, that Islâm recognizes no barriers in inviting humanity to its creed. It was meant, from the first day, for the whole world, for every man belonging to any family, tribe, or country and speaking any language.

Let us now see if this seat of learning at Madînah resembled the institutions offering only one course of study, like those of the earlier prophets, or it was like a university which turns out specialists in varied subjects fitted for different jobs and vocations. But, before we proceed further, let us have a look at the training institute of Moses ﷺ. You would find here only men-at-arms and a few commanders like Joshua ﷺ besides some priests and judges. Try to find out the disciples of Jesus ﷺ, and you would see a few mendicants wandering in the by-lanes of Palestine. But here, in the theological seminary of Madînah, you would find al-Ash’am, the Negus of Abyssinia; Farwâ, the governor of Ma’ân; Dhul-Kal’â, the head of Himyr; ‘Âmir b. Shahr, the prince of Hamadan; Fîrûz Dailamî and Markabûd, the governors of Yemen; and ‘Ubayd and Ja’far, the chieftains of Oman. You would also see, among the disciples of Muhammad ﷺ, a number of serfs like Bilâl, Yâsir, Shu’yeb, Khabbâb, ‘Ammâr, and Abû Fukayha as well as slave girls like Sumayya, Labina, Zanirah, Nahdiya, and Umm ‘Abis rubbing their shoulders with the blue-blooded aristocracy of Arabia رضى الله عنهم.

Those who graduated from this University included men of wisdom and master spirits of the age who ruled over nations and countries. They include Abû Bakr b. Abî Quhâfa, ‘Umar b. al-Khattâb, ‘Uthmân b. ‘Affân, and ‘Alî b. Abî Tâlib رضى الله عنهم. There was also Mu’âwiyah b. Abû Sufyân رضى الله عنه, who held in his hands the reins of all the lands from Africa in the west to the borders of India in the east. They proved themselves such ideal rulers as never seen by the world before or after them: their administration threw into shade the greatest kingdoms of all times and their rules of justice eclipsed the Roman and Iranian legal systems.

This institution produced great generals like Khâlîd b. Walîd, Sa’d b. Abî Waqqâs, Abû ‘Ubayda b. Jarrah, and ‘Amr b. Abî al-‘Âs رضى الله عنهم who overthrew the two despotic empires of the east and the west in a few years. They became great conquerors whose exploits are still admired with amazement. Sa’d snatched the crowns of Iraq and Iran; Khâlîd and Abû ‘Ubayda رضى الله عنهم turned out the Byzantines from Syria, restoring the land of Abraham ﷺ to its rightful owners; ‘Amr b. al-‘Âs swooped down upon the ancient land of Pharaoh; while ‘Abd Allâh b. Zubair and Ibn

Abî Sarah رضى الله عنهم swept out the enemy from North Africa. Their conquests demonstrate their military genius which has few parallels in the history of the world.

There were successful administrators and governors also among the alumni of this prophetic school. Bâzân b. Sâsân ruled over Yemen, Khâlîd b. Sa'îd over Sanâ'a, Muhâjir b. Ummya over Kinda, Zayad b. Walîd over Hadramaut, 'Amr b. Hazm over Najrân, Yazîd b. Abû Sufyân over Taima and 'Alâ b. al-Hadramî رضى الله عنهم over Bahrain besides scores of others exercising authority over populous countries.

The learners of this institute have also excelled as scholars and legists. 'Umar b. al-Khattâb, 'Alî b. Abî Tâlib, 'Abd Allâh b. 'Abbâs, 'Abd Allâh b. Mas'ûd, 'Abd Allâh b. 'Amr al-Âs, 'Âyesha, Umm Salamah, Abî b. Ka'b, Mu'âdh b. Jabal, Zaid b. Thâbit, and Ibn Zubayr رضى الله عنهم are some of the illustrious legists who laid the foundation of Islâmîc jurisprudence. They can, verily, be compared with the greatest legislators of the world.

Biographers and chroniclers are also to be seen among the inceptors of this prophetic school. Abû Huraira, Abû Mûsâ al-Ash'ari, Anas b. Mâlik, Abû Sa'îd al-Khudrî, 'Ubâdah b. as-Sâmit, Jâbir b. 'Abd Allâh, and Barâ' b. 'Âzib رضى الله عنهم are amongst hundreds other who narrated and recorded all the details of Islâmîc faith and practice as well as the events and occurrences of the life of the Prophet ﷺ.

Here we also find a batch of studious learners, indifferent to every other pursuit that attracts the attention of men, having no other place to live save the Mosque of the Prophet ﷺ. They are seventy in number, devoting themselves wholly to prayers and orisons and learning all about the faith from the great teacher.

This does not, in any case, exhaust the list of the students of this institute, nor their achievements. There is Abû Dharr رضى الله عنه, a man so truthful that the world would have hardly seen one like him. Disregardful of the world and all that it stands for, he never keeps with him provisions for the morrow. He gets the title of the Christ of Islâm from his mentor for his truthfulness and piety. Salmân رضى الله عنه, the Persian, is another disciple who is the very picture of piety and devotion. Yet another pious soul, 'Abd Allâh b. 'Umar رضى الله عنه can also be seen here who spends thirty years of his life in the service of his faith, but when he is asked to take the reins of the then world's largest empire in his hands, he gives his consent on the condition that he will abdicate if even a drop of Muslims' blood is shed during his regime. Mus'ab b. 'Umayr رضى الله عنه was the smart chic, always dressed in silk and brocade, but after he accepted Islâm he was ever seen in patched garments of coarse cloth. When he dies he has not a cloak long enough to cover him from head to foot and his foot has to be covered with grass! There is also 'Uthmân b. Maz'ûn رضى الله عنه, a mystic of pre-Islâmîc days. Muhammad b. Salamah رضى الله عنه is yet another disciple who declares: "Were a Muslim to enter my room to kill me, I would not attack him." Here is also Abû Dardâ رضى الله عنه ever spending his days in fasts and nights in prayers.

The trainees of this institution include men of wisdom, such as Talhâ, Zubayr, Mughîra, Miqdâd, Sa'd b. Mu'âdh, Sa'd b. 'Ubâdah, 'Usaid b. Hudayr, As'ad b. Zarârah, 'Abd ar-Rahmân b. 'Auf, and Sa'd b. Zubayr رضى الله عنهم. They come from the businessmen of Makkah and the farmers of Madînah but everyone of them proved his worth as a capable administrator, a statesman, or a prosperous businessman.

Another group of men we come across here are those who gave their life for their faith but never thought of retracing their steps. Hâla, son of Khadîjah from her

former husband was minced by infidels; Sumayya, the mother of ‘Ammâr died of the injury inflicted by Abû Jahl; Yâsir was cruelly tortured on the rack to die a violent death; Khubayb was crucified; Zayd welcomed death by bowing his head before the assassin’s scimitar; Harâm b. Milhân and his seventy companions were treacherously done to death at Bîr Ma’ûna by the tribes of Usayya, Ri’î, and Dhakwân; ‘Âsim was slain with seven others at al-Raj’î by Banû Hudhayl; the blood of Ibn Abî al-‘Aujâ and his forty-nine companions was shed by Banû Salîm in 7 A.H./628 C.E.; Ka’b b. ‘Umar Ghifârî and his friends were massacred in the plain of Dhât al-Atlâ’ but the martyrs رضى الله عنهم never strayed from the path of truth they had discovered at the feet of their teacher. A well-known religion flatters itself of the crucifixion of a single man, but how many martyrs were there among the learners of this school of Madînah?

Life is lost only once whether it be taken by the blade of the sword, or the head of the spear, or the hangman’s rope. But greater was the endurance of those who had to bear persecution for years; those who were made to lie on the burning charcoal and the hot sands of Arabia, the men on whose chests were placed heavy rocks and those who were dragged around by the rope tied round their necks. They were asked to deny Muhammad ﷺ and his God, but nothing save the sound of “One, One” came out of their throats. During the period of boycott imposed by the Quraish on the Muslims, the Prophet ﷺ and his kinsmen had very often absolutely nothing save the leaves of trees to fill their bellies for days together. Sa’d b. Abî Waqqâs رضى الله عنه relates that once he happened to lay his hands on a piece of dry hide which he roasted and took with water. ‘Utba b. Ghazwân رضى الله عنه says that seven of his friends had developed sores in their mouths by taking these unnatural things. When Khabbâb b. al-Aratt رضى الله عنه embraced Islâm he was forced to lie flat on the burning charcoal until the fire cooled down under him. Bilâl رضى الله عنه was regularly thrown on his back in the hottest season of the Arabian desert and then a great rock used to be placed on his chest. He was often dragged around by the rope put round his neck. Abû Fukayha رضى الله عنه was very often tied by his legs and pulled along, throttled and a heavy rock so big was placed on his chest that his tongue used to come out. ‘Ammâr رضى الله عنه was frequently forced to lie down on burning sand and beaten mercilessly. Zubayr رضى الله عنه was rolled up in a mat by his uncle and made to inhale smoke. Sa’îd b. Zayd رضى الله عنه was too often bound with ropes and beaten, and so was tortured ‘Uthmân رضى الله عنه by his uncle. But none recanted, not repented, nor anybody ever forsook the faith once accepted by him. They were all surely possessed by the truth that never gives way to falsehood.

Is it not surprising that the unlettered and uncultured, rude and savage Bedouins, worshippers of idols and fetish, were turned into wise and polite, cultured and sagacious people by one of them, who was as unlettered as any of them? How could the unarmed Prophet ﷺ make commanders and generals of them? How did they get the reservoir of courage and fortitude through a man who was himself helpless and defenceless? How were the people who had never bowed their heads before Allâh made reverent worshippers, pious and godly? You have just had a glimpse of Muhammad’s ﷺ great seminary and its learners of various categories: scholars, legists, warriors, judges, and rulers. They included the poor as well as the rich, slaves as well as masters and combatants as well as martyrs. Have you not reached the conclusion that here was that superman, Muhammad ﷺ, the emblem of perfection, whose virtues were reflected, in different shades and colors, in his companions and

disciples? It was the Prophet's ﷺ sagacity which showed its face in Abû Bakr and 'Uthmân; his intrepidity found expression in Khâlîd and Abû 'Ubayda, Sa'd and Ja'far Tayyâr; his devotion, piety, and prayers illuminated the arch and pulpit in the form of Ibn 'Umar, Abû Dharr, Salmân, and Abû Dardâ; his knowledge and learning brightened the minds of Ibn 'Abbâs, Abî b. Ka'b, Zayd b. Thâbit, and 'Abd Allâh b. Mas'ûd; and his patience displayed itself in the perseverance of Bilâl and Suhayb, 'Ammâr and Khubayb رضي الله عنهم. Like the glorious lamp of heaven Muhammad ﷺ illumined every nook and corner of the world, the peaks of mountains, sandy deserts, running streams and verdant pastures; his were the streams of rain showering life and vitality over all lands and peoples, which helped all nations to blossom out its latent qualities.

Regardless of the varied talents and accomplishments of the Prophet's ﷺ companions, the feature uniformly conspicuous in all was the sparkling spirit of faith. Whether one was rich or poor, a king or a friar, a ruler or the ruled, a judge or a witness, a commander or a cavalier, a teacher or the taught, an ascetic or a trader, a fighter or a martyr, Muhammad's ﷺ light of love-divine, spirit of selflessness, zeal for sacrifice, sympathy for his fellow beings, and, above all, his ardor for achieving the pleasure of Allâh had made a dent in every heart. Whatever position one occupied and wherever one happened to be, this was the burning emotion that kept all of them restless, irrespective of their differing dispositions and individual traits. Their God was One, the Qur'ân was their common Scripture, they owed allegiance to the same Prophet, bowed their heads in the same direction, and the ultimate aim of their endeavor was the same—to make this world a better place for the mankind, to do good to every man, to preach the message of Allâh to one and all, and to make the truth triumphant over everything else.

These are but brief glimpses of Muhammad's ﷺ many-sided and comprehensive character. His diverse qualities are like flowers of different colors and hue. Like the natural phenomena, human character also shows a multifariousness of characteristics, traits, dispositions, and capacities. And, for the guidance of all these diverse human characters and characteristics, there can be no comprehensive and everlasting guide and teacher save Muhammad, the last of the prophets of Allâh ﷺ. This is the reason why Allâh commanded Muhammad ﷺ to proclaim: "If ye love Allâh, follow me; Allâh will love you." "Follow me," only Muhammad ﷺ can say, "if you love Allâh, whether you are a soldier or a commander, a teacher or a student, a beggar or a millionaire, a subject or a ruler, a saint or a commoner—for the path of virtue and goodness and righteousness lies only in following my example."

Blessings of Allâh be upon him, his family, and his companions.

Chapter Six

Practicality

“Verily in the messenger of Allâh ye have a good example.” [Qur’ân 33:21]

How to follow an apostle of Allâh is an important question, though, unfortunately, hardly touched upon by the biographers of earlier prophets and founders of religions. In the case of Muhammad ﷺ, the Messenger of Allâh, however, this is the most detailed and illuminating part of his biography. The practical examples set by him are, for a fact, so refreshing and compelling that they alone would be sufficient to demonstrate his finality of prophethood and leadership of all the saints, sages, and prophets sent by Allâh for the guidance of the human race.

There has never been any dearth of the words of wisdom, couched in sweet and pleasing phrases, but what is lacking is the act and the deed—the deed demonstrating the impressive aphorisms. If one goes through the biographies and writings of religious preceptors, one would find interesting doctrines, engaging parables, elegant discourses, and graceful utterances which would undoubtedly be fascinating, but one would labor in vain to discover how these great sages had themselves acted upon their precepts.

Morality is the practical system of human behavior making a distinction between the right and the wrong. Still, no religious scripture has claimed, like the Qur’ân, that the promulgator of its faith was the best in conduct amongst his followers. But the Qur’ân asserts:

“Nay, verily for thee (Muhammad ﷺ) is a Reward unfailing; And lo! Thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character.” [Qur’ân 68:3-4]

The two verses cited here are coordinative according to their grammatical construction since they imply the inference of one statement from another. The first clause claims a “great reward” for the Prophet ﷺ, which is abiding also, while the latter gives the reason for it. Unfailing recompense is promised to him because of his sublime nature and character. Such was the Messenger of Allâh ﷺ who had demanded from the people: “Why say ye that which ye do not?” [Qur’ân 61:2]

The Prophet ﷺ had a right to ask this question for he always did what he said. Weigh the characters of two prophets, just for a comparison, one on the Mount of Olives and the other on the Mount of Safâ, and you would see the difference. One has lofty sermons unaccompanied by any practical example while the other does whatever he preaches. To forgive your enemy after you have gained power and authority over him is noble and virtuous, but the quietism of a weak and helpless person cannot be taken as a proof of his eschewing revenge. One can only lay a claim to negative virtues, say, by not hitting anybody, not killing anyone, not being wrongful, not laying hands on another man’s property, not constructing a house for oneself, or not amassing riches. He may have committed none of these, but the question is whether he has helped anyone, saved anyone from being killed or done any good to someone, given something to the needy, given shelter to someone or distributed alms to the poor and destitute? The world needs positive virtues: an act consists of doing something and not merely of abstaining from it. The Qur’ân is quite clear on this aspect of Muhammad’s ﷺ character.

“It was by mercy of Allâh that thou wast lenient with them (O Muhammad), for if thou hadst been stern and fierce of heart they would have dispersed from round about thee.”
[Qur’ân 3:159]

This verse talks about the kindheartedness of the Prophet ﷺ and also adduces the proof that “they would have dispersed from round about” him if he had been stern and hardhearted.

Again, the Qur’ân says:

“There hath come unto you a messenger, (one) of yourselves, unto whom aught that ye are overburdened is grievous, full of concern for you, for the believers full of pity, merciful.” [Qur’ân 9:128]

The Qur’ân speaks here of the concern of Muhammad ﷺ for the welfare of entire humanity. Allâh informs that the persistence of the unbelievers in their ungodly ways is sure to invite divine wrath, and this is heartrending to His Apostle. The merciful nature of the Prophet ﷺ and his ardent desire to save mankind from the impending catastrophe impels him to call the people to the path of righteousness. He is even more kind to those who listen to his call. The revelation, thus, testifies to the kindness of Muhammad ﷺ for the whole mankind, in general, and to the Muslims, in particular.

This is the testimony of Allâh about the character of Muhammad ﷺ.

The revelation contained in the Qur’ân consists of divine commands which you may call the teachings of Islâm. But, the Scripture is also a running commentary on the practical conduct of Muhammad ﷺ as an apostle of Allâh. There was not an injunction revealed to him that he did not demonstrate by his own example. He talked about faith, Unity of God, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, poor-due, charity, fighting in the way of Allâh, self-sacrifice, determination, perseverance, endurance, thanksgiving, virtuous deeds, and morals; and demonstrated every one of these by setting a personal example. It is no exaggeration to claim that his life was an illustration of what one finds written in the Qur’ân. Once a few companions asked ‘Āyeshâ رضي الله عنها about the moral virtues of the Prophet ﷺ. She replied, “Have you not read the Qur’ân?” “His character was the exponent of the Qur’ân,” says another tradition handed down in the *As-Sunan* of Abû Dâwûd. The Qur’ân contains precepts in words and phrases while Muhammad’s ﷺ life is their practical demonstration.

Nobody can claim to know a man more intimately—about his character, behavior, and disposition—than his own wife. When Muhammad made the claim that he had been bestowed the mantle of divine apostleship, he had been married to Khadîja رضي الله عنها for fifteen years. This was a sufficiently long time for any woman to know her husband to his heart and soul. But, what was the opinion formed by Khadîja رضي الله عنها about her husband? The moment he told her about the revelation and his prophethood, Khadîja رضي الله عنها accepted his words without the least hesitation. It was the Prophet ﷺ himself who was a bit perplexed, but she assured him: “Nay, it will not be so, I swear to Allâh. He will never make thee melancholy or sad, for you are kind to your relations, you speak the truth, you clear the debts of others, you help the poor, you are hospitable, you assist your fellowmen, and you bear the afflictions of people in distress” [*Al-Sahîh*]. Such had been the Prophet’s ﷺ conduct even before he was chosen by Allâh for apostleship.

Of all the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, one more dearly loved by him after Khadîja رضي الله عنها, was ‘Āyeshâ رضي الله عنها who had spent nine years of her life with the Prophet ﷺ. She affirms: “He never spoke ill of anybody. Instead of returning evil for evil, he used to

forgive those who gave offence to him. He was always clear of iniquity and never had his revenge. He never hit any maid or slave or servant or even a dumb creature. He never turned down a seemly request, whosoever made it.”

Among the relatives of the Prophet ﷺ, nobody was closer to him than ‘Alî رضي الله عنه. He had been with the Prophet ﷺ from his childhood. He bears witness that “the Prophet was of cheerful disposition, kindhearted and had a clear conscience. Warm-hearted and gracious, he was never harsh to anybody nor did he ever cast reflection upon anyone. If he disliked the request made by someone, he normally kept quiet instead of giving a blunt reply or acquiescing in such demands. Those who knew his habit, understood what he meant by his silence. He never liked to sadden anybody; rather, he used to set the hearts at ease; he was kind, compassionate.”

‘Ali رضي الله عنه further adds: “He was benevolent, lavishly generous, truthful and exceedingly kindhearted. It was a pleasure to have his company. Whoever met him for the first time was filled with awe but with closer contact became attached to him” [Tirmidhî].

The well-known British historian Gibbon has also expressed almost the same opinion about the character of the Prophet ﷺ.

Hind رضي الله عنها, the son of Khadîja رضي الله عنها from her former husband, says about the Prophet ﷺ: “Kind of heart, he was nice and sweet tempered. He never liked to displease or cause offence to anybody. He thanked others even for trifling favors. He took whatever food was placed before him without making any adverse remark. He never got angry for anything concerning his own person, nor did he think of taking revenge or letting down anybody, but if anyone opposed what was just and right, he used to get sore and helped the right cause with all his might” [Ibid].

These are the testimonies furnished by those who were close to the Prophet ﷺ and knew him like the back of their hands. How unblemished would have been the character so praised by those who had a long and intimate experience of his conduct and behavior?

Another aspect of the Prophet’s ﷺ character, which is even more praiseworthy, is that he always practiced what he preached to others.

The Prophet ﷺ called upon his companions to develop a deep and abiding affection for Allâh through worship and remembrance. Leaving aside the living awareness of Allâh, conspicuous in the life and character of the Prophet’s ﷺ companions, let us see how far the Prophet ﷺ himself lived up to his teachings. Was there a single moment throughout the day and night when he lost the communion or was forgetful of Allâh? Illuminated by the light-divine that had broken in upon him, he maintained the consciousness of the living, loving God whether sitting or walking, eating or drinking, sleeping, or waking. A great portion of the *ahâdîth*, extant today, consists of his supplications, beseechments, and glorification of Allâh, which he used to recite on different occasions. The *Hiseen Hiseen* is a book of two hundred pages containing the implorations which he used to offer from time to time. Every word of these litanies burns and breathes of his unbounded devotion to Allâh and his impassioned admiration for Him since these were embedded deep into his heart. The Qur’ân, speaking of the pious and God-fearing souls, says:

“Such as remember Allâh, standing, sitting, and reclining...” [Qur’ân 3:191]

This is how the Prophet ﷺ spent his life. ‘Âyeshâ رضي الله عنها says that he used to be ever engrossed in the remembrance of Allâh.

The Prophet ﷺ enjoined upon his followers to offer prayers, but how did he pay the divine honors himself? He had made the obligatory prayers, five times a day, incumbent

on others, but it was his custom to be one his knees eight times every day. Besides the five prayers of *fajr*, *zuhr*, *‘asr*, *maghrib*, and *‘isha*, he also offered the prayers of *ishrâq*, after sunrise, *chasht*, when the sun had well risen, and *tahajjud*, after midnight. These three were voluntary prayers not incumbent on every believer. A man normally performs seventeen *rak’âts* of prayer in the five obligatory ones, but the Prophet ﷺ continued to offer about sixty *rak’âts* throughout his life. He never missed even the midnight prayers. He used to stand in the prayers for such length of time that his legs often got swollen. When ‘Âyeshâ رضي الله عنها once remonstrated with him: “Why do you take all this trouble? Allâh has already redeemed you.” “What,” she got the reply, “Should I not behave like a thankful servant?” His was not the supplication arising out of fear or awe, but was an expression of his ardent devotion and unbounded love for Allâh. He used to remain bowed before his Lord for spells so long that it appeared as if he had forgotten to move over to prostration.

The Prophet ﷺ had begun offering prayers from the very beginning of his ministry. The pagans of Makkah detested his way of prayer, but he always offered prayers in the Ka’bah in front of the holy sanctuary. Many a time he was attacked by the disbelievers while he was engaged in prayers, but he never left the practice. It was still more difficult to offer prayers in the din of warfare when the enemy rode full tilt against his small body of followers, seeking the Prophet ﷺ to end the dispute forever. But no sooner than the time did arrive for prayers that he was leading the faithful in the service of Allâh. In Badr, when the two armies were arrayed against each other, he hastened to his prayer mat to raise his hands supplicating Allâh for the victory of his ill-equipped force. Never was he late in offering the prayers, nor were even two of them missed concurrently. Once, in the Battle of Trenches, he was not able to say *‘asr* prayers owing to the fierce assault by the enemy, and then, on another occasion, he had to offer pre-dawn prayers after the sunrise since everybody had fallen asleep after a night-long journey. After the Apostle’s ﷺ illness had worsened, a few days before his death, he came to the mosque supported by two of his companions in order not to miss the congregational prayer. When he was unable to get up, towards the end of his life’s journey, and was relapsing into unconsciousness, he tried thrice to join the congregation but fell down unconscious after each attempt. This was the way the Prophet ﷺ showed, by his own example, how one should pay homage to Allâh.

The Prophet ﷺ commanded keeping of fasts throughout the month of Ramadân. But, in addition to these, he punctuated every week with a fast or two. “When he took to the keeping of fasts,” says ‘Âyeshâ رضي الله عنها, “it appeared as if he would never give them up.” The Prophet ﷺ forbade his followers to prolong the voluntary fasts beyond a day at a time, but he himself used to fast continuously for days together without even taking anything during the night. If his companions tried to emulate him, he dissuaded them saying: “Who amongst you is like me? My Lord provideth sustenance to me.” Normally, he kept fast for the whole of two months during Sha’bân and Ramadân, the 13th, 14th, and 15th of each month, the first ten days of Muharram, six days following the ‘Id-ud-Fitr, and on Mondays and Thursdays in every week [*Mishkât al-Masâbih*]. In this manner did the Prophet ﷺ teach his followers how to keep fasts.

The Prophet ﷺ impressed the merit of almsgiving, but he also showed the way to it by his own magnanimous charity. We have mentioned elsewhere how Khadîja رضي الله عنها had praised his philanthropy—“You clear the debts of others and help the poor.” Muhammad

ﷺ never asked his followers to forsake their houses, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, and children for his sake [Mt. 10:37], nor did he advise them to sell all they had and give the money to the poor [*Ibid*, 19:21]. He did not even say that it would be very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven [*Ibid*, 19:23]. “Spend of that We have bestowed upon thee” was the divine command and the Prophet ﷺ exhorted to give away a part of one’s earnings in charity as an act of thanksgiving to one’s Lord. But how did he himself act on his precept? He always gave away whatever he had with both hands. Booty of war came laden on camels but he never kept anything for himself or his family. Extremely frugal in his habits, spending days after days without anything to satisfy his hunger—this was the way of living chosen voluntarily by him. After the capture of Khaibar in 7A.H./ 628C.E., his normal practice was to distribute the cereals received after the harvest among his wives for their maintenance. But before the year was over, a large part of it was given away in charity with the result that his household had to live from hand to mouth for several months. “More generous than all of us,” says Ibn ‘Abbâs رضي الله عنه, “was the Apostle, who used to give away freely during the Ramadân. He never said ‘no’ in reply to any request, and never took his food alone. No matter in what small quantity was the food available, he invited all those present to partake it with him. He had asked us to inform him if any Muslim died without paying his debts, for he always took the responsibility to repay it. The legacy of the deceased, of course, devolved on his heirs.” Once a Bedouin said to him rudely, “All this does not belong to thee or thy father. Let my camel be loaded with it.” Instead of taking offense to his insolent remark, the Prophet ﷺ immediately agreed to his suggestion and got his dromedary laden with date and oats. He often used to tell his companions: “I am a trustee charged to apportion everybody’s share. Verily, the donor is Allâh.”

Abû Dharr رضي الله عنه, a companion of the Prophet ﷺ, relates that once he accompanied the Prophet ﷺ going somewhere in the night, when he remarked: “Abû Dharr, if the mount of Uhud were turned into gold for me, I would not like three nights to pass with a single *dînâr* left in my possession. Of course, that excludes whatever I may keep apart for clearing somebody’s debts.”

This was not merely a pious wish but the words of a Prophet expressed with the determination to act on his precepts. And he always did act in that manner. A large amount of tithe was once received from Bahrain. The Prophet ﷺ directed the companions to store it in the courtyard of the Mosque. Next morning he came to the mosque for performing his prayers but passed by the heap of treasure without even setting his eyes on it. The prayer ended, and he sat down near the bags distributing the money to one and all. He stood up only after he had given away to the last shell as if it were a filth which he wanted to get rid of as quickly as possible.

Another time, cereals loaded on four camels were brought from Fadak, which was meant to meet the requirements of the Prophet’s ﷺ family. A portion of it was first given away in satisfaction of the debt incurred earlier. Then Bilâl رضي الله عنه was asked by the Prophet ﷺ to distribute the remainder to the poor and the needy. Bilâl رضي الله عنه, however, reported after some time that some of it was still left as nobody was available to receive the charity. Extremely perplexed to hear the news, the Prophet ﷺ remarked: “I cannot go to take rest in my house so long as this pelf remains lying here.” He spent that night in the mosque and went to his house early next morning when Bilâl رضي الله عنه told him that the good gracious Allâh had been kind enough to unburden him of his care. The Prophet ﷺ thanked Allâh

before returning to his house, but he came back, visibly agitated, after a short while. When asked about the reason for his coming back, he replied, “It recurred to my mind that this small piece of gold was also lying in my house. I feared lest the sun should go down again and it remains with me.”

Umm Salamah رضى الله عنها has related another incident. She says: “The Prophet ﷺ looked sad and melancholy when he came to my house one day. On being asked the reason for it, he said: ‘Umm Salamah, the seven *dīnars* I had received yesterday are still lying on my bed.’” There is another episode of even greater significance. It is related that when the Prophet’s illness took a turn for the worse and he was lying on his bed restless with a splitting headache, he suddenly recalled that a few gold sovereigns received earlier had not been given away. He implored to give away the sovereigns at once with the words: “Shall Muhammad meet his Lord while he had these sovereigns still with him?” Such was the example of charity set by the holy Prophet ﷺ.

The Prophet of Islām ﷺ commended frugal living and contentment. It has been stated earlier that spoils, tithes, and poor-dues came to Madīnah laden on pack-animals from every nook and corner of the country. But the ruler of Arabia more often had nothing in his house, not even enough to make the two ends meet. ‘Āyeshâ رضى الله عنها related after his death: “The Prophet ﷺ left this world but he never had a full meal twice in a day.” She adds that the day he died, she had nothing with her except a handful of oats. His coat of mail had already been pawned with a Jew. He used to say: “Son of Adam has no right to possess anything except a small hut to live, a pair of clothes to wear, simple bread to eat, and water to fill his belly.” He perhaps alluded to his own way of living in this manner, for he had a mud house with only one room, thatched with date-leaves and camels’ hair. Āyeshâ رضى الله عنها says that she never had to keep the Prophet’s ﷺ dresses, meaning thereby that the clothes put on by him were the only one he had at that time. Once a beggar came to complain that he was hungry. The Prophet ﷺ sent word to his wives but none had anything to offer except water.

Abû Talha رضى الله عنه relates that once he saw the Prophet ﷺ lying in the mosque. He was, at the time, hungry and restless. Some of his companions, on another occasion, complained of hunger to the Prophet ﷺ and showed him the slab of stone each had tied to his stomach to mitigate the aching void. They found the Prophet ﷺ still more famished for he had tied two slabs of stones to his stomach. At times his voice showed that he was starving. Another time, when he had had nothing to eat for quite a few days, he went to see Abû Ayyûb Ansârî رضى الله عنه who immediately brought some fresh dates and got some meals cooked for him. Before taking anything brought to him, he sent a bread with some meat to Fâtimâ رضى الله عنها who had also not taken anything for the last two days.

Fâtimâ and her two sons, Hasan and Husain رضى الله عنهم, were deeply loved by the Prophet ﷺ, but he never pampered them with costly clothes and jewellery. Once he saw a gold necklace round the neck of his daughter. He admonished her saying, “Fâtimâ, do you want the people to say that Muhammad’s daughter is bedecked with the necklace of fire?” Fâtimâ رضى الله عنها at once took off the necklace and sold it to liberate a slave with its price. Similarly, on another occasion, he got his beloved wife ‘Āyeshâ رضى الله عنها to cast off gold bracelets she had been putting on. The Prophet ﷺ often used to remark: “Man needs only that much of the world as a wayfarer requires petty cash to meet his urgent needs.” This was not a piece of advice meant for others. Some of his companions who were pained to see the marks of a rough mat on his body, offered to provide him a soft

bedding, but he dismissed their suggestion with the remark: “What have I to do with the world? Only that much is lawful for me as a rider going on his errand requires rest under a shady tree.”

The entire belongings of the Prophet ﷺ in 9 A.H/ 630C.E., when the frontiers of the Islâmic State had extended from Yemen to the borders of Syria, consisted of an undergarment which hung down a few inches below his knees, a rough bedstead, a pillow filled with the bark of date, a handful of barley, a hide-skin, and a water pail. This was all he possessed, and such was his contentment with bare subsistence!

Many a preacher can be seen exhorting others to become noble-minded and eschew selfishness, but does anyone himself observe that golden rule? Nevertheless, here is an exalted example of one who preached this lofty ideal not through words but by his deeds. All of us know how Muhammad ﷺ adored his favorite daughter, Fâtimâ رضي الله عنها, but this very beloved daughter had to live in such reduced circumstances that she had developed blisters through driving the handmill and drawing water from the well. Distressed and pinched by her privations, she approached her father one day to ask for a maid servant. The reply she got was, “Fâtimâ, my daughter, no provision has yet been made for the poor *Suffah* companions. How can your request be granted?” Another reply ascribed to him is: “The orphans of Badr had made a request before you did.”

A companion presented a shawl to the Prophet ﷺ at a time when he needed one. A man present on the occasion remarked, “How fine!” The Prophet ﷺ presented the shawl to him instantly. Another time, a companion had to celebrate certain function but he had nothing to entertain his guests. The Prophet ﷺ directed him to go and take a basketful of flour from ‘Âyeshâ رضي الله عنها although nothing else was available for his own household on that day. Once he came to ‘Âyeshâ رضي الله عنها with his *Suffah* companions and asked her to bring whatever food was available. A few breads, some soup of dates, and a cup of milk were all that was available in his house to entertain the guests. This is how the Prophet ﷺ taught the lesson of self-denial and contentment to others.

What endurance and patience is needed to demonstrate one’s absolute reliance on Allâh? For a practical example of it we shall have, again, to turn to Muhammad, the Prophet of Allâh ﷺ. The Lord had commanded the Prophet ﷺ:

“Then have patience even as the stout of heart among the messengers (of old) had patience.” [Qur’ân 40:35]

And, he calmly endured all the hardships and insults heaped upon him by an unmannered and harsh people. The Makkans, among whom he was born, were uncultured and boorish, arrogant, and insolent. Unwilling to hear a word against their deities, they were always ready to kill and be killed rather than countenance disgrace to their idols. But the Prophet ﷺ cared nothing for their wrath and always went to preach the Unity of God in the sanctuary of the Ka’bah. This was also the rendezvous of the Makkans’ chieftains, but Muhammad ﷺ had made it a point to prostrate before the Lord, within their sight, without paying any heed to their furious opposition. Then was received the divine command:

“So proclaim that which thou art commanded.” [Qur’ân 15:94]

We know how Muhammad ﷺ carried out this command by summoning the whole of Makkah from the summit of Mount Safa. The persecution of the lonely Prophet started. They manhandled him, abused and oppressed him, threw rubbish over him, tried to strangulate him, sowed thorns in his way, but never did he stop from proclaiming Allâh’s

religion. When his uncle Abû Tâlib hinted at abandoning him, the inspiring reply he gave to his uncle was: “O my uncle, by Allâh, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left on the condition that I abandoned this course, I would not do so until Allâh has made it victorious, or I perish therein.” He was forced to withdraw in the vale of Shuy’ba Abû Tâlib for three long years, nothing reaching him and his family in the confinement. He was exhausted and the children and the old were emaciated by taking leaves of the trees to satisfy their pangs of hunger. At last, the conspiracy was hatched to kill him but he remained firm and unshaken. He took refuge in a cave where he was almost tracked down by the enemy in hot pursuit of the fugitives. His companion then mumbled in terror: “O Apostle of Allâh, we are only two here.” The Prophet ﷺ, however, had ample patience and faith in Allâh. “Grieve not,” he replied, “Lo! Allâh is with us” [Qur’ân 9:40]. Again, during the same journey when Sarâqa got near the two on his horse, Abû Bakr ؓ, could not help crying out, “O Messenger of Allâh, we have been caught.” The Prophet ﷺ was even then serene and calm, chanting the Scripture with full confidence in the succor of his God.

Madînah was also not safe from danger. Threatened by surprise attack of his former enemies, he had also snakes of his bosom like the Jews and hypocrites of Madînah. Guards were detailed for keeping night-long vigils but, then, the revelation was revealed; perhaps, again, to demonstrate what faith in Allâh meant to the Prophet ﷺ. “Allâh will protect thee from mankind” [Qur’ân 5:67], assured the Lord, and he promptly came out to ask the guards to go away and take rest since Allâh’s protection was enough for him.

On his return from an expedition to Najd, the Prophet ﷺ was taking rest under a tree. No companion was near him. A Bedouin came forward with an unsheathed sword in hand and demanded from the Prophet ﷺ: “Muhammad, who can now save you from me?” The Prophet’s ﷺ sleep was disturbed, he opened his eyes and said calmly: “Allâh.” The reply was so reassuring, so full of trust in Allâh, that the enemy put his sword back in the scabbard!

The same was the story at Badr also. One thousand well-armed Makkans were locked in battle against three hundred Muslims not all of whom were under arms. But where was the Commander of these three hundred empty-handed soldiers? Away in a corner of the battlefield he could be seen bowing and prostrating and lifting his hands in prayer. “O Allâh,” he was entreating, “if they are destroyed today, Thou wilt be worshipped no more.”

There were also occasions when the Muslims had to suffer a defeat. They were, at times, so overwhelmed by the charging enemy that they had to run for their lives but the one who had absolute trust in Allâh, stood firm at his place like a rock. At Uhud the Muslim forces were put to flight and the enemy slew many of them. The Prophet ﷺ, however, stuck to his place. He was hit by a stone, fell on his side, and one of his teeth was smashed; his face was scarred, his lips were injured, and blood smeared his face. Still, he did not unsheath his sword, for he was confident of the help of his Lord. Again, in the battle of Hunayn, when the Muslims were terrified by a sudden attack and took to their heels none heeding the other, the Apostle ﷺ mounted from his dromedary and called out: “Where are you going men? Come to me. I am Allâh’s Apostle. I am Muhammad, the son of ‘Abd Allâh.”

Is there any other Commander who holds fast to his post in the battlefield even after his army takes to flight? Who neither takes to the sword nor loses his heart but remains firm

in his faith in Allâh! Who does not forget even in such a precarious situation to beseech the help of Allâh for granting him victory! Such was the heroism and the fortitude and the faith of Muhammad ﷺ since he had to set an example for those who fight solely for the sake of Allâh.

You would have heard the exhortation “Love thy enemy,” but would have never seen how the enemy is loved? It is not necessary to present here the hardships undergone by the Prophet ﷺ at Makkah where he was persecuted and helpless, for it is no use making a virtue of necessity. When Muhammad ﷺ was migrating to Madînah, the pagan chiefs of Makkah had set a reward of hundred camels for capturing him alive or dead. Sarâqa b. Mâlik b. Ju’shum رضى الله عنه took to his horse in pursuit of the Prophet ﷺ, thrice did he cast his divining arrows and thrice he got the reply: “Do him no harm.” He refused to be put off and went ahead but, lo, thrice his horse stumbled, its forelegs went into the ground, throwing him away from the horseback. He then came to the conclusion that the Prophet ﷺ was protected against him and would have the upper hand. Psychologically speaking, he had lost his nerves. He decided to turn back, but before doing so he called out to the Prophet ﷺ requesting to write him a document of safety for the day when he would gain victory over the Makkans. The document was promptly given to him. Sarâqa رضى الله عنه embraced Islâm after Makkah was captured. When he came to see the Prophet ﷺ, the latter did not even ask Sarâqa رضى الله عنه why he had gone in pursuit of him on the behest of his enemies.

You know Abû Sufyân رضى الله عنه alright. He was the leader of the Quraish in the battles of Badr, Uhud, and Trenches, to name but a few. How many Muslims were killed because of him and how many times had he tried to root out Islâm and kill the Prophet ﷺ? He was such an arch-enemy of Islâm that when he came to see the Prophet ﷺ, just before the conquest of Makkah, along with ‘Abbâs رضى الله عنه, all those who were present on the occasion recommended to kill him. But Abû Sufyân رضى الله عنه was confident in his heart of heart that Muhammad ﷺ would never take revenge. And, he was right, for Muhammad not only forgave him but also allowed him to proclaim that whoever would enter his house in Makkah would be safe against the assault of the invading army [Ibn Is’hâq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p.548].

Hind رضى الله عنها, the wife of Abû Sufyân رضى الله عنه, had been present in the battle of Badr inciting the pagans of Makkah to fight to the last against the Muslims. In the battle of Uhud she had cut off the ears and noses of Muslim martyrs to make anklets and collars. She had cut out the liver of the Prophet’s ﷺ uncle Hamza رضى الله عنه and chewed it and so mutilated his dead body that the Prophet ﷺ was sickened to see it. After the capture of Makkah she came veiled in disguise to accept Islâm, but was still insolent in her replies to the questions asked by the Apostle of Allâh ﷺ. She was, nevertheless, forgiven without being asked to explain her previous conduct. Astonished by the remarkable mercy of the Prophet ﷺ, Hind exclaimed: “Muhammad, no tenet I hated aforetime more than yours, but none is now dearer to me than your pavilion” [*Ibid*, p.553].

Wahshi had killed Hamza in the battle of Uhud. When Makkah was conquered, he fled to Tâ’if, but when Tâ’if also surrendered, he was in an impasse but someone said to him, “Good heavens, what is the matter? He does not kill anyone who enters his religion. You cannot get peace anywhere except in his company.” He came back to seek forgiveness. The Prophet ﷺ recalled the mutilated corpse of his uncle on seeing Wahshi رضى الله عنه, but

forgave his crime. He simply said: “Hide your face from me and never let me see you again” [*Ibid*, p.376].

‘Ikramah رضي الله عنه was the son of Abû Jahl, the worst enemy of the Prophet ﷺ. He hated Islâm like his father and had fought against the Muslims on several occasions. After Makkah was occupied by Muslims, he reflected over his past crimes and thought it wise to leave for Yemen. His wife, Umm Hakîm رضي الله عنها, embraced Islâm and repaired to Yemen to console him and to bring him back to Makkah. As soon as the news of his arrival was received, the Apostle ﷺ got up so hurriedly that his shawl fell from his shoulders. He hailed ‘Ikramah with the words: “Welcome to thee, O émigré rider!” Father of this man had been the leader of persecutors, and had caused the Prophet ﷺ untold miseries. Was rubbish not thrown by Abû Jahl over the Prophet ﷺ and had he not conspired to kill him? Had he not led the infidels against Muslims at Badr and rejected every counsel of peace with the Muslims? But now, his son was received with open arms to tell the world that the enemy is loved in this wise! [*Ibid*, p.551]

There was another man, Habbâr b. al-Aswad by name, who was responsible for the death of Muhammad’s ﷺ daughter, Zaynab رضي الله عنها. He was one of those few heartless criminals who had been condemned after the conquest of Makkah. He wanted, at first, to go away to Iran, but on reconsideration went straight to the Prophet ﷺ and confessed his guilt. “I wanted to leave for Iran,” said he, “but looking back to your clemency I have come to you, O Prophet of Allâh. The reports you have received about me are all correct.” Confession of Habbâr رضي الله عنه so softened the heart of the merciful Apostle that he forgave him instantly, forgetting even the death of his own daughter!

‘Umayr b. Wahb رضي الله عنه was another leader of the Quraish of Makkah. Shortly after the battle of Badr he sharpened his sword and smeared it with poison, and went off to Madînah to seek his revenge from the Prophet ﷺ. He was seen entering the mosque and was taken prisoner. His guilt was proved, but the softhearted Prophet ﷺ allowed him to depart in freedom. ‘Umayr had agreed to kill the Prophet ﷺ on the promise of another chief, Safwân b. Umayya رضي الله عنه, who had undertaken to discharge his debts and to support his family. After Makkah had fallen to the Muslims, Safwân fled to Jidda to take a ship for Yemen. ‘Umayr, however, told the Prophet ﷺ that Safwân was the chief of his people, who had run away to cast himself into the sea. The Prophet ﷺ was so moved by the plight of his former enemy that he granted him immunity. On ‘Umayr’s request for a sign to prove it to Safwân, the Prophet ﷺ gave him his turban with which he had entered Makkah. ‘Umayr overtook Safwân before he could embark the ship and begged him to return with him. Safwân was not agreeable, however. He said: “I go in fear of my life because of Muhammad.” But ‘Umayr who was not very long ago after the blood of the Prophet ﷺ replied: “He is too clement and too honorable to kill you.” At last Safwân returned and asked the Prophet ﷺ: “I have been told that you have granted me immunity. Is it correct?” When the Prophet ﷺ replied in affirmative, Safwân asked for two months in which to make up his mind, and the Prophet ﷺ gave him four months to decide. But four months was a pretty long time in the company of the merciful Prophet ﷺ. Safwân رضي الله عنه accepted Islâm well before the time was up.

When the Prophet ﷺ led an expedition to Khaibar, the stronghold of the Jews, and captured the city after a fierce battle, a Jewess brought a roasted lamb poisoned by her to kill the Prophet ﷺ. After chewing a morsel of the meat the Prophet ﷺ came to know of the poison and asked to produce the woman before him. She confessed what she had

done, but the Prophet ﷺ let her off although he suffered from the toxic effect of the food brought by her for the rest of his life [*Ibid*, p.516].

On yet another occasion, a disbeliever was apprehended on the charge of lying in wait to kill the Prophet ﷺ. He was in a flutter when he was produced before the Prophet ﷺ, because of fear, but the Prophet ﷺ consoled him saying: “Don’t fear. You could not have killed me, even if you wanted to do so.”

A band of eighty warriors was rounded up just before the capture of Makkah. They wanted to bear down upon the Prophet ﷺ, but was let off by the merciful Apostle of Allâh.

You would have surely heard of Tâ’if. It was the city which had refused to grant asylum to the persecuted Prophet ﷺ. It had decline even to listen to him. Here it was that, encouraged by ‘Abdu Yâfîl, its chief, the touts and slaves had insulted and shouted and pelted stones on the Apostle ﷺ until his shoes were filled with blood; and when he had sat down tired and brokenhearted to take some rest, the touts had compelled him to move along amidst their missiles. How could the Prohpet ﷺ forget the sufferings of Tâ’if, for it was the worst of torments he had had to endure in his whole life. In 7 A.H/ 628C.E., the Muslim army had laid a siege of Tâ’if but it had to retire after suffering a loss, since the walls of the city could neither be scaled nor gave way to the besiegers. The Muslims who did not want to raise the siege without reducing the city begged the Prophet ﷺ to curse the people of Tâ’if. But, when he raised up his hands in prayer, he was heard not cursing the people of Tâ’if but invoking blessings for them. “O Allâh, guide the people of Tâ’if and make them accept Thy religion,” was the prayer sent up by the merciful Apostle of Allâh ﷺ.

In the battle of Uhud when the Muslims were put to flight and the enemy tried to get at the Prophet ﷺ, he was hit by a stone which smashed one of his teeth, his face was scarred, and his lip was injured. The Prophet’s ﷺ incisor was broken and blood began to run down his face. He wiped the blood saying the while: “How can a people prosper who have stained their Prophet’s face with blood while he summoneth them to their Lord? O Allâh, show them the right path for they know it not.” This was the practical example of loving one’s enemy. It demanded putting one’s life at stake rather than preaching a high flown dictum to the peaceful crowd.

We have mentioned ‘Abdu Yâfîl, the cruel-hearted chief of Tâ’if. When he ultimately came to Madînah, the Prophet ﷺ got a tent pitched for him within the sacred mosque. He had parleys with ‘Abdu Yâfîl, after the night prayers were over, and told him about the hardships undergone at Tâ’if. The love and respect accorded to the former enemy was yet another example of loving one’s enemy not through words but by deeds” [*Ibid*, p.615].

When Makkah fell to the arms of the Prophet ﷺ, all the chiefs of the city assembled in the courtyard of the Ka’bah. This was the place where the Prophet ﷺ had once been insulted and beaten, where conferences of the elders of Makkah used to be held for doing away with him, and the persons present were those who had persistently denied and opposed him. They were the persons who had poked fun at him, pelted stones upon him, sown thorns in his way, tortured and killed the helpless believers, and instigated the whole of Arabia to destroy the Prophet ﷺ and his faith. On that day they all stood as criminals, conscious of their guilts, surrounded by ten thousand well-armed warriors ever willing to square the past accounts with them. At last the Prophet ﷺ broke the silence and asked: “O Quraish, what do you think that I am about to do with you?” “Good

Muhammad,” they replied, “You are a noble brother, son of a noble brother.” The Prophet ﷺ then gave his verdict: “Go your way for you are the freed ones” [*Ibid*, p.553].

This is how the enemy is loved and forgiven—a shining example without any parallel in the annals of the world. One has not to indulge in rhetorics and high sounding words to teach a lesson, but to wade through blood and tears for setting a noble example.

It should now be clear why Islâm invites us to follow not merely the injunctions of its Scripture but also demands to take after the example of the Messenger of the divine Scripture. If other religions only ask to comply with the teachings of their founders, it is because they do not have any living model of their preceptors. The Prophet of Allâh ﷺ had told his followers a few days before he departed from this world:

“I have left you two things, and you will not go astray as long as you hold these fast. The one is the Book of Allâh and the other is my own way (my *sunnah*).”

These are the two lighthouses of guidance still pointing out the way to virtue and goodness, and so shall they remain to the end of time. “*Verily in the messenger of Allâh ye have a good example,*” says the Lord to ratify the Apostle’s dictum. Islâm, thus, presents the practical example of its Prophet in support of its teachings, and this is its distinguishing feature amongst the religions of the world. It does not merely say, “Offer prayers,” but also asks its Prophet to exhort, “Offer prayers as you see me praying.” Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ directs his followers: “The best amongst you is he who is good to his wife and children, and I am the best of all in being good to my wife and children.” Take another example. During the last *hajj*—the Hajj of Farewell—the Prophet ﷺ had a hundred thousand believers around him. He intended to convey the message of Allâh, the principles of peace and justice and human brotherhood; but he did not forget to illustrate everything he wanted to preach by his own example. He said:

“All the blood shed in the pagan past of Arabia is to be left unavenged. The first claim on blood I abolish is that of my own nephew, the son of Rabi’a b. al-Hârith b. ‘Abd al-Muttalib. All the usurious transactions are abolished this day and I abolish first of all the claims of my uncle ‘Abbâs b. ‘Abd al-Muttalib.”

Security of life and property of the individuals is the basic need of every civilized society. Next comes ‘honor’ which more often than not means acting in accordance with the prevalent customs, rites, and etiquettes of the society. To abolish any customs, even stale and useless, is to incur disgrace in the eyes of one’s compatriots. For an undying shame is attached to the discontinuance of time-honored customs even the greatest reformers have often found it difficult to mark a total break with the social usages and conventions.

But, what is the record of Muhammad ﷺ in this regard? Slaves were accorded the lowest place in pre-Islâmic Arab society. The Arabs were so conscious of nobility of blood and race that they deemed it a dishonor to fight an enemy unequal to them in social standing—it was shameful to stain one’s sword with the blood of a low-born man. This was the mood and temper of Arab society when the Prophet ﷺ declared:

“Lo! You are all sons of Adam and Adam was created of clay. The blacks have no precedence over the whites nor the whites over blacks; Arabs enjoy no superiority over non-Arabs nor the non-Arabs over Arabs. The best amongst you is one who is more pious, God-fearing.”

This declaration brought all, the high and the low, the master and the slave on an equal plane, but it had to be accompanied by a striking example to catch the imagination of the

people. Allâh's Messenger ﷺ, therefore, declared his slave to be his adopted son. Going a step further, he married his own cousin's sister, belonging to the noblest and blue-blooded tribe of Quraish, to his freed serf Zayd رضي الله عنه, who had since been adopted as his son. It was then that the writ of Allâh was revealed abolishing all artificial relationships, as the custom of adoption was, in order to restore the hereditary rights of blood-relations. Zayd b. Muhammad again became Zayd b. Hârith رضي الله عنه.

For the time-honored customs die hard, social reforms seldom succeed unless pressed to their logical end. But, the task was difficult as well as dangerous, because marriage with the widowed or divorced wife of the adopted son was looked down upon by the Arabs as ignominious and incestuous. The commandment of Allâh had, nevertheless, to prevail, if only to curb the evils emanating from that custom, although it meant sealing one's infamy. The holy Prophet ﷺ had again to set an example by marrying the divorced wife of Zayd رضي الله عنه. He broke the age-old custom of the pagan past and put an end to the system of adoption and its evils forever.

There are many more examples to be cited but the limited time available would not permit me to do so. Still, the instances just given are enough to set you thinking whether there is any other teacher and guide of humanity right from Adam to Jesus Christ عليه السلام who was able to present such illustrious models of practical morality in every field of life?

A few words more and I would finish the day's discourse. You would have seen several eloquent preachers talking about the spiritual coupling of the Heavenly Father and His only begotten son. But, if a tree is known by its fruits, you have to see whether divine love was also discernible in the life of its gopeller! Read the biography of the adorer of Allâh born in Arabia and you would find that when the whole world fell asleep, this lover of God used to bow down in worship, his hands raised in prayers, his tongue singing the praises of Allâh, his heart troubled and uneasy, and his eyes shedding tears in holy breathing. Does this present the picture of love or the life of Jesus عليه السلام?

According to the Christian Gospels, when Jesus عليه السلام was crucified he cried with a loud voice saying, "*Eli, Eli lama sabach thani?*—My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" [Mt. 27:46. Muslims do not believe that Jesus عليه السلام was crucified]. But when the Prophet ﷺ breathed his last he was reciting "*Allâh-ur-Rafîq al-A'lâ*—my Lord, my dearest friend." Whose was the spirit of piety that flowed into his life and conduct and mode of expression?