

# Description of the Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h.

by Athar Husain

An excerpt from the book entitled "*The Message of Mohammad*," by **Athar Husain**.

## Appearance

Muhammad (pbuh) was of a height a little above the average. He was of sturdy build with long muscular limbs and tapering fingers. The hair of his head was long and thick with some waves in them. His forehead was large and prominent, his eyelashes were long and thick, his nose was sloping, his mouth was somewhat large and his teeth were well set. His cheeks were spare and he had a pleasant smile. His eyes were large and black with a touch of brown. His beard was thick and at the time of his death, he had seventeen grey hairs in it. He had a thin line of fine hair over his neck and chest. He was fair of complexion and altogether was so handsome that Abu Bakr composed this couplet about him: "As there is no darkness in the moonlit night so is Mustafa, the well-wisher, bright."

His gait was firm and he walked so fast that others found it difficult to keep pace with him. His face was genial but at times, when he was deep in thought, there were long periods of silence, yet he always kept himself busy with something. He did not speak unnecessarily and what he said was always to the point and without any padding. At times he would make his meaning clear by slowly repeating what he had said. His laugh was mostly a smile. He kept his feelings under firm control - when annoyed, he would turn aside or keep silent, when pleased he would lower his eyes [Tirmidhi].

## Dress

His dress generally consisted of a shirt, tamad (trousers), a sheet thrown round the shoulders and a turban. On rare occasions, he would put on costly robes presented to him by foreign emissaries in the later part of his life. [Ahmed, Musnad, Hafiz Bin Qayyim]

His blanket had several patches (Tirmidhi). He had very few spare clothes, but he kept them spotlessly clean (Bukhari). He wanted others also to put on simple but

clean clothes. Once he saw a person putting on dirty clothes and remarked,

**"Why can't this man wash them."** [Abu Dawood]

On another occasion he enquired of a person in dirty clothes whether he had any income. Upon getting a reply in the affirmative, he observed, **"When Allah has blessed you with His bounty, your appearance should reflect it."** [Abu Dawood]

He used to observe: **"Cleanliness is piety."**

## Mode of living

His house was but a hut with walls of unbaked clay and a thatched roof of palm leaves covered by camel skin. He had separate apartments for his wives, a small room for each made of similar materials. His own apartment contained a rope cot, a pillow stuffed with palm leaves, the skin of some animal spread on the floor and a water bag of leather and some weapons. These were all his earthly belongings, besides a camel, a horse, and an ass and some land which he had acquired in the later part of his life (Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood). Once a few of his disciples, noticing the imprint of his mattress on his body, wished to give him a softer bed but he politely declined the offer saying, **"What have I to do with worldly things. My connection with the world is like that of a traveller resting for a while underneath the shade of a tree and then moving on."**

Amr Ibn Al-Harith, a brother-in-law of the Prophet (pbuh), says that when the Prophet died, he did not leave a cent, a slave man or woman, or any property except his white mule, his weapons and a piece of land which he had dedicated for the good of the community. [Sahih Bukhari]

He advised the people to live simple lives and himself practised great austerities. Even when he had become the virtual king of Arabia, he lived an austere life bordering

on privation. His wife A'isha (ra) says that there was hardly a day in his life when he had two square meals. [Sahih Muslim]

When he died there was nothing in his house except a few seeds of barley left from a mound of the grain obtained from a Jew by pawning his armour. [Sahih Bukhari]

He had declared unlawful for himself and his family anything given by the people by way of *Zakat* or *sadaqa* (types of charity). He was so particular about this that he would not appoint any member of his family as a *Zakat* collector. [Sahih-Kitab Sadqat]

## His manners and disposition

*"By the grace of Allah, you are gentle towards the people; if you had been stern and ill-tempered, they would have dispersed from round about you"* [Qur'an 3:159]

About himself the Prophet (pbuh) said **"Allah has sent me as an apostle so that I may demonstrate perfection of character, refinement of manners and loftiness of deportment."** [Malik]

By nature he was gentle and kind-hearted, always inclined to be gracious and to overlook the faults of others. Politeness and courtesy, compassion and tenderness, simplicity and humility, sympathy and sincerity were some of the keynotes of his character. In the cause of right and justice he could be resolute and severe but more often than not, his severity was tempered with generosity. He had charming manners which won him the affection of his followers and secured their devotion. Though virtual king of Arabia and an apostle of Allah, he never assumed an air of superiority. Not that he had to conceal any such vein by practice and artifice -- with fear of Allah, sincere humility was ingrained in his heart. He used to say, **"I am a Prophet of Allah but I do not know what will be my end."** [Sahih Bukhari]

In one of his sermons calculated to instil the fear of Allah and the day of reckoning in the hearts of men, he said, **"O people of Quraish be prepared for the hereafter, I cannot save you from the punishment of Allah; O Bani Abd Manaf, I cannot save you from Allah; O Abbas, son of Abdul Mutalib, I cannot protect you either; O Fatima, daughter of**

**Muhammad, even you I cannot save."** [Sahihin]

He used to pray, **"O Allah! I am but a man. If I hurt any one in any manner, then forgive me and do not punish me."** [Ahmed, Musnad]

He always received people with courtesy and showed respect to older people and stated: **"To honour an old man is to show respect to Allah."**

He would not deny courtesy even to wicked persons. It is stated that a person came to his house and asked permission for admission. The Prophet (pbuh) remarked that he was not a good person but might be admitted. When he came in and while he remained in the house, he was shown full courtesy. When he left A'isha (ra) said,

"You did not think well of this man, but you treated him so well." The Prophet (pbuh) replied, **"He is a bad person in the sight of Allah who does not behave courteously and people shun his company because of his bad manners."** [Sahih Bukhari]

He was always the first to greet another and would not withdraw his hand from a handshake till the other man withdrew his. If one wanted to say something in his ears, he would not turn away till one had finished. [Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi] He did not like people to get up for him and used to say, **"Let him who likes people to stand up in his honour, he should seek a place in hell."** [Abu Dawud]

He would himself, however, stand up when any dignitary came to him. He had stood up to receive the wet nurse who had reared him in infancy and had spread his own sheet for her. His foster brother was given similar treatment. He avoided sitting at a prominent place in a gathering, so much so that people coming in had difficulty in spotting him and had to ask which was the Prophet (pbuh). Quite frequently uncouth, Bedouins accosted him in their own gruff and impolite manner but he never took offence. [Abu Dawud]

He used to visit the poorest of ailing persons and exhorted all Muslims to do likewise (Bukhari, Sahih Bukhari, Chapter "Attendance on ailing persons"). He would sit with the humblest of persons saying that righteousness alone was the criterion of one's superiority over another. He invariably invited people be they slaves, servants or the poorest believers, to partake with him of his scanty meals. [Tirmidhi]

Whenever he visited a person he would first greet him and then take his permission to enter the house. He advised the people to follow this etiquette and not to get annoyed if anyone declined to give permission, for it was quite likely the person concerned was busy otherwise and did not mean any disrespect. [*Ibid.*]

There was no type of household work too low or too undignified for him. A'isha (ra) has stated, "He always joined in household work and would at times mend his clothes, repair his shoes and sweep the floor. He would milk, tether, and feed his animals and do the household shopping." [Qazi Iyaz: Shifa; Sahih Bukhari]

He would not hesitate to do the menial work of others, particularly of orphans and widows. [Nasi, Darmi]

Once when there was no male member in the house of the companion Kabab Bin Arat who had gone to the battlefield, he used to go to his house daily and milk his cattle for the inhabitants [Ibn Saad ]

## Children

He was especially fond of children and used to get into the spirit of childish games in their company. He would have fun with the children who had come back from Abyssinia and tried to speak in Abyssinian with them. It was his practice to give lifts on his camel to children when he returned from journeys (Bukhari, Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 2 pg. 886). He would pick up children in his arms, play with them, and kiss them. A companion, recalling his childhood, said, "In my childhood I used to fell dates by throwing stones at palm trees. Somebody took me to the Prophet (pbuh) who advised me to pick up the dates lying on the ground but not to fell them with stones. He then patted me and blessed me." [Abu Dawud]

## Daily routine

On the authority of Ali, Tirmidhi has recorded that the Prophet (pbuh) had carefully apportioned his time according to the demands on him for:

- offering worship to Allah
- public affairs, and
- personal matters.

After the early morning prayers he would remain sitting in the mosque reciting praises of Allah till the sun rose

and more people collected. He would then preach to them. After the sermons were over, he would talk genially with the people, enquire about their welfare and even exchange jokes with them. Taxes and revenues were also distributed at this time [Sahih Muslim, Tirmidhi]

He would then offer chaste prayers and go home and busy himself with household work. [Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi]

He would again return to the mosque for the midday and afternoon prayers, listen to the problems of the people and give solace and guidance to them. After the afternoon prayers, he would visit each of his wives and, after the evening prayers, his wives would collect at one place and he would have his dinner. [Sahih Muslim]

After the night prayers, he would recite some Suras of the Qur'an and before going to bed would pray: **"O Allah, I die and live with thy name on my lips."**

On getting up he would say, **"All praise to Allah Who has given me life after death and towards Whom is the return."**

He used to brush his teeth five times a day, before each of the daily prayers. After midnight, he used to get up for the *tahajjud* prayers which he never missed even once in his life. [Sahih Bukhari]

He was not fastidious about his bed – sometimes he slept on his cot, sometimes on a skin or ordinary mattress, and sometimes on the ground. [Zarqani]

On Friday he used to give sermons after the weekly "*Jummah*" prayers. He was not annoyed if anyone interrupted him during the sermons for anything. It is stated that once, while he was delivering his sermon, a Bedouin approached him and said, "O messenger of Allah, I am a traveller and am ignorant of my religion." The Prophet (pbuh) got down from the pulpit, explained the salient features of Islam to him and then resumed the sermon. [Tirmidhi]

On another occasion his grandson Hussein, still a child, came tumbling to him while he was delivering a sermon. He descended and took him in his lap and then continued the sermon. [*Ibid.*]

## Trust in Allah (swt)

Muhammad (pbuh) preached to the people to trust in Allah (swt). His whole life was a sublime example of the precept. In the loneliness of Makkah, in the midst of persecution and danger, in adversity and tribulations, and in the thick of enemies in the battles of Uhud and Hunain, complete faith and trust in Allah (swt) appears as the dominant feature in his life. However great the danger that confronted him, he never lost hope and never allowed himself to be unduly agitated. Abu Talib knew the feelings of the Quraish when the Prophet (pbuh) started his mission. He also knew the lengths to which the Quraish could go, and requested the Prophet (pbuh) to abandon his mission, but the latter calmly replied, **"Dear uncle, do not go by my loneliness. Truth will not go unsupported for long. The whole of Arabia and beyond will one day espouse its cause."** [Ibn Hisham, Sirat-ur-Rasul]

When the attitude of the Quraish became more threatening, Abu Talib again begged his nephew to renounce his mission but the Prophet's (pbuh) reply was: **"O my uncle, if they placed the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, to force me to renounce my work, verily I would not desist therefrom until Allah made manifest His cause, or I perished in the attempt."** [Ibid.]

To another well-wisher, he said, **"Allah will not leave me forlorn."**

A dejected and oppressed disciple was comforted with the words **"By Allah, the day is near when this faith will reach its pinnacle and none will have to fear anyone except Allah."** [Sahih Bukhari]

It was the same trust in Allah (swt) which emboldened the Prophet (pbuh) to say his prayers openly in the *haram* in the teeth of opposition. The Quraish were once collected there and were conspiring to put an end to his life when he next entered the *haram*. His young daughter Fatima, who happened to overhear their talk rushed weeping to her father and told him of the designs of the Quraish. He consoled her, did his ablutions and went to the *Ka'bah* to say prayers. There was only consternation among the Quraish when they saw him. [Ahmed, Musnad]

Then leaving his house for Madinah he asked Ali (ra) to sleep on his bed and told him, **"Do not worry, no one will be able to do you any harm."** [Tabari, Ibn Hisham]

Even though the enemies had surrounded the house, he

left the house reciting the Quranic verse:

*"We have set a barricade before them and a barricade behind them and (thus) have covered them so that they see not."* [Qur'an 36:9]

Abu Bakr was frightened when pursuers came close to the cavern in which he and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) were hiding during their flight, but the Prophet (pbuh) heartened him, **"Grieve not. Allah is with us."**

A guard was kept at the Prophet's house in Madinah because of the danger that surrounded him but he had it withdrawn when the Quranic verse was revealed:

*"Allah will protect you from the people."* [Qur'an 5:67]

A man was caught waiting in ambush to assault the Prophet (pbuh) but he was directed to be released with the words, **"Even if this man wanted to kill me, he could not."** [Ahmed, Musnad]

A Jewess from Khaibar had put poison in the Prophet's (pbuh) food. He spat it out after taking a morsel but a disciple who had his fill died the next day. The Jewess was brought before the prophet (pbuh) who questioned her: **"Why did you do this?" "To kill you," was her defiant reply. She was told, "Allah would not have allowed you to do it."** [Sahih Muslim]

In the battle of Uhud when the rear guard action of the Makkan army had disorganized the Muslim army and had turned the tables, the Prophet (pbuh) stood as firm as a rock even though he had suffered personal injuries. When Abu Sufyan taunted the Muslims and shouted "Victory to hubal!" (hubal was one of their idols), the Prophet (pbuh) asked Umar (ra) to shout back, "Allah is our protector and friend. You have no protector and friend. Allah is Great, Magnificent." [Ibn Hisham]

Again in the battle of Hunain, when the unexpected assault of the army had swept the Muslim force off its feet and a defeat seemed imminent, the Prophet (pbuh) did not yield ground. With trust in Allah (swt) he showed such courage that the Muslim army rallied behind him to win a signal victory.

## Justice

The Prophet (pbuh) asked people to be just and kind. As the supreme judge and arbiter, as the leader of men, as generalissimo [head commander and chief] of a rising power, as a reformer and apostle, he had always to deal with men and their affairs. He had often to deal with mutually inimical and warring tribes when showing justice to one carried the danger of antagonizing the other, and yet he never deviated from the path of justice. In administering justice, he made no distinction between believers and nonbelievers, friends and foes, high and low. From numerous instances reported in the traditions, a few are given below.

Sakhar, a chief of a tribe, had helped Muhammad (pbuh) greatly in the siege of Taif, for which he was naturally obliged to him. Soon after, two charges were brought against Sakhar: one by Mughira of illegal confinement of his (Mughira's) aunt and the other by Banu Salim of forcible occupation of his spring by Sakhar. In both cases, he decided against Sakhar and made him undo the wrong. [Abu Dawud]

Abdullah Bin Sahal, a companion, was deputized to collect rent from Jews of Khaibar. His cousin Mahisa accompanied him but, on reaching Khaibar, they had separated. Abdullah was waylaid and done to death. Mahisa reported this tragedy to the Prophet (pbuh) but as there were no eye-witnesses to identify the guilty, he did not say anything to the Jews and paid the blood-money out of the state revenues. [Sahih Bukhari] A woman of the Makhzoom family with good connections was found guilty of theft. For the prestige of the Quraish, some prominent people including Asmaa Bin Zaid interceded to save her from punishment. The Prophet (pbuh) refused to condone the crime and expressed displeasure saying, **"Many a community ruined itself in the past as they only punished the poor and ignored the offences of the exalted. By Allah, if Muhammad's (My) daughter Fatima would have committed theft, her hand would have been severed."**[Sahih Bukhari]

The Jews, in spite of their hostility to the Prophet (pbuh), were so impressed by his impartiality and sense of justice that they used to bring their cases to him, and he decided them according to Jewish law. [Abu Dawud]

Once, while he was distributing the spoils of war, people flocked around him and one man almost fell upon him. He pushed the man with a stick causing a slight abrasion. He was so sorry about this that he told the man that he could have his revenge, but the man said, "O messenger

of Allah, I forgive you." [Abu Dawud]

In his fatal illness, the Prophet (pbuh) proclaimed in a concourse assembled at his house that if he owed anything to anyone the person concerned could claim it; if he had ever hurt anyone's person, honour or property, he could have his price while he was yet in this world. A hush fell on the crowd. One man came forward to claim a few dirhams which were paid at once. [Ibn Hisham]

## Equality

Muhammad (pbuh) asked people to shun notions of racial, family or any other form of superiority based on mundane things and said that righteousness alone was the criterion of one's superiority over another. It has already been shown how he mixed with everyone on equal terms, how he ate with slaves, servants and the poorest on the same sheet (a practice that is still followed in Arabia), how he refused all privileges and worked like any ordinary labourer. Two instances may, however, be quoted here: Once the Prophet (pbuh) visited Saad Bin Abadah. While returning Saad sent his son Quais with him. The Prophet (pbuh) asked Quais to mount his camel with him. Quais hesitated out of respect but the Prophet (pbuh) insisted: **"Either mount the camel or go back."** Quais decided to go back. [Abu Dawood]

On another occasion he was travelling on his camel over hilly terrain with a disciple, Uqba Bin Aamir. After going some distance, he asked Uqba to ride the camel, but Uqba thought this would be showing disrespect to the Prophet (pbuh). But the Prophet (pbuh) insisted and he had to comply. The Prophet (pbuh) himself walked on foot as he did not want to put too much load on the animal. [Nasai]

The prisoners of war of Badr included Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet (pbuh). Some people were prepared to forgo their shares and remit the Prophet's (pbuh) ransom but he declined saying that he could make no distinctions. [Sahih Bukhari]

During a halt on a journey, the companions apportioned work among themselves for preparing food. The Prophet (pbuh) took upon himself the task of collecting firewood. His companions pleaded that they would do it and that he need not take the trouble, but he replied, **"It is true, but I do not like to attribute any distinction to myself. Allah does not like the man who considers himself superior to his companions."** [Zarqani, Vol. 4 pg. 306]

## Kindness to animals

The Prophet (pbuh) not only preached to the people to show kindness to each other but also to all living souls. He forbade the practice of cutting tails and manes of horses, of branding animals at any soft spot, and of keeping horses saddled unnecessarily. [Sahih Muslim] If he saw any animal over-loaded or Milad he would pull up the owner and say,

**"Fear Allah in your treatment of animals."** [Abu Dawood]

A companion came to him with the young ones of a bird in his sheet and said that the mother bird had hovered over them all along. He was directed to replace her offspring in the same bush (Mishkat, Abu Dawood)

During a journey, somebody picked up some birds eggs. The bird's painful note and fluttering attracted the attention of the Prophet (pbuh), who asked the man to replace the eggs. [Sahih Bukhari]

As his army marched towards Makkah to conquer it, they passed a female dog with puppies. The Prophet (pbuh) not only gave orders that they should not be disturbed, but posted a man to see that this was done. He stated, **"Verily, there is heavenly reward for every act of kindness done to a living animal."**

## Love for the poor

The Prophet (pbuh) enjoined upon Muslims to treat the poor kindly and to help them with alms, *Zakat*, and in other ways. He said: **"He is not a perfect Muslim who eats his fill and lets his neighbour go hungry."**

He asked, **"Do you love your Creator? Then love your fellow beings first."**

Monopoly is unlawful in Islam and he preached that **"It is difficult for a man laden with riches to climb the steep path that leads to bliss."**

He did not prohibit or discourage the acquisition of wealth but insisted that it be lawfully acquired by honest means and that a portion of it would go to the poor. He advised his followers to **"give the labourer his wages before his perspiration dried up."** He did not encourage beggary either and stated that **"Allah is**

**gracious to him who earns his living by his own labour, and that if a man begs to increase his property, Allah will diminish it and whoever has food for the day, it is prohibited for him to beg."**

To his wife he said, **"O A'isha, love the poor and let them come to you and Allah will draw you near to Himself."** [Sahih Bukhari]

One or two instances of the Prophet's (pbuh) concern for the poor may be given here. A Madinan, Ibad Bin Sharjil, was once starving. He entered an orchard and picked some fruit. The owner of the orchard gave him a sound beating and stripped off his clothes. The poor man appealed to the Prophet (pbuh) who remonstrated the owner thus:

**"This man was ignorant, you should have dispelled his ignorance; he was hungry, you should have fed him."** His clothes were restored to the Madinan and, in addition, some grain was given to him [Abu Dawood]

A debtor, Jabir Bin Abdullah, was being harassed by his creditor as he could not clear his debt owing to the failure of his date crop. The Prophet (pbuh) went with Jabir to the house of the creditor and pleaded with him to give Jabir some more time but the creditor was not prepared to oblige. The Prophet (pbuh) then went to the oasis and having seen for himself that the crop was really poor, he again approached the creditor with no better result. He then rested for some time and approached the creditor for a third time but the latter was adamant. The Prophet (pbuh) went again to the orchard and asked Jabir to pluck the dates. As Allah would have it, the collection not only sufficed to clear the dues but left something to spare. [Sahih Bukhari]

His love for the poor was so deep that he used to pray: **"O Allah, keep me poor in my life and at my death and raise me at resurrection among those who are poor."** [Nasai]