

Al-Shama'il al-Muhammadiyya: The Perfect Traits of the Messenger, peace be upon him.

Introduction.

There are different types of works compiled by the early scholars from which we can learn about the perfect traits of the Messenger, peace be upon him. In short, they can be divided into three genres:

a. Hadith Literature.

These are primary works which include everything related to the Messenger, peace be upon him. For example:

*His sayings, actions and silent approvals.

*His perfect traits.

Examples include *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Ibn Maja*, *Sunan Abu Dawud* and *Sunan al-Nasa'i*. Collectively, these six collections are called the *Sihah Sitta* (The Six Canonical Collection).

b. Sirah Literature.

These are works which focus exclusively on the life of the Messenger, usually in chronological order. Such works will focus less on Shari'ah (Salah, Zakah, Hajj and so on) and more on his life, actions and contributions.

Examples include *Sirah Ibn Hisham* and *al-Bidaya wa'l Nihaya*. Many of these works do not start from the birth of the Messenger, peace be upon him, but the condition and state of Arabia before he appeared. The purpose is to show how much of a difference our Prophet made to mankind once he appeared. Also, some works extend to after the life of the Messenger (peace be upon him) to include the biography of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs and beyond.

c. Shama'il Literature.

These works are focused on describing what the Messenger (peace be upon him) was like, physically and morally.

Examples include *al-Shama'il al-Muhammadiyya* by Imam al-Tirmidhi, *al-Khasa'is al-Kubra* by Imam al-Suyuti and *al-Mawahib al-Laduniyya* by Imam al-Qastalani.

In short, the scholars, even to this day, ensure no aspect of the Prophet's life was left without investigation, research and enquiry. There are separate treatises on all aspects of his life. This itself is an indication and manifestation of love and compassion for the final Messenger.

Human traits.

Allah has given us all good characteristics, as well as bad ones. Some of us are physically weak but we have been given great wisdom and intellect. Some people are not bestowed with intelligence but they have ample warmth and compassion for fellow humans.

In fellow humans we should always try to find the good points, and not to dwell on the bad. This was the teachings and practice of our Messenger, peace be upon him. One of Allah's names is Sattar, which means the one who covers. Allah covers our defects and sins and does not expose them to others. If Allah can hide our shortcomings, what right do we have to expose the shortcomings of others?

Whereas we have good characteristics as well as bad ones, our Messenger (like all prophets and messengers) possessed all the best qualities and no bad ones. He was flawless, inwardly and outwardly. Here are just some of his perfect qualities.

a. His birth.

He was born circumcised and born without an umbilical cord (*al-Shifa*, p. 45). An umbilical cord is designed to receive nourishment and it also gets rid of the waste. The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not have an umbilical cord because he came to give, not to receive. Whilst she was pregnant, his blessed mother Aamina (may Allah be pleased with her) would feel fragranced and people would ask her what scent she had applied. It was actually the scent of Muhammad (peace be upon him) inside her womb.

b. His physical features.

*He was neither tall nor short. Miraculously, he never stood out when he walked with short people, or out-of-place when he walked with tall people.

*His hair was neither crisply curled nor smooth, and brown in colour. It was loosely curled and it reached the lobes of his ears.

*He was broad shouldered and physically well-built.

*He was white with a reddish tinge, dark black-eyed, with long eyelashes.

*He was thickly bearded, had smooth cheeks, a wide mouth and a small gap between his front teeth. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) reports that Allah's Messenger had a gap between the middle pair of his teeth. When he spoke, it seemed as if light were emerging from between his middle teeth.

c. His smile.

Abd Allah ibn al-Harith ibn Juz: 'I never saw anyone smile more than the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him).' Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) reports that the Messenger of Allah said: 'Verily I know the very first person to enter Janna and the very last man to exit the fire (and enter Janna). A man will be brought forward on the Day of Judgement and it will be said to him: 'Present to him the smallest sin he committed' and his much larger sins will not be exposed. It will be said to him: 'you did such and such on x day.' He will admit to it and will not deny it, though he will be worried about the much larger sins he committed. It will be said: 'For each sin he committed, convert it into good acts.' At that moment, he will say: 'Indeed I have other sins that you have not exposed here.'

Abu Dharr remarked: 'I saw the Prophet (peace be upon him) smile so much that his molar teeth became apparent.'

*This itself is the clearest indication that he was a man of peace – violent men seldom smile. He could not be a terrorist or a man of violence if he smiled all the time.

d. His humour.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) would find time to joke with his Companions. But even when he joked, it was always truthful.

Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) that a man came to a Prophet asking for a transporting animal. The Prophet replied: 'I am going to give you a baby she-camel.' The man became worried that he would not be able to ride such a small animal so he said: 'O Messenger of Allah! What will I do with a baby she-camel?' The Prophet replied: 'Every camel gives birth to a child!'

e. His scent.

His natural scent was more beautiful than musk perfume.

The mother of Anas (may Allah be pleased with them) once bottled the perspiration of the Messenger whilst he was sleeping. People would know that the Prophet passed by an alley by the scent left behind. Even when he died, the same was the case. Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) washed the body of the Prophet (peace be upon him). I expected the smell associated with the dead, but I did not find anything as such. So I said: You were pure, living and dead. A beautiful fragrance emitted from him that I had never smelt before (*al-Shifa* p.45).

f. His touch.

His touch with soft as velvet. There was no harshness about him whatsoever. Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

'I served the Messenger of Allah for ten years. During that time, he never even said 'uff' to me. When I did something, he never asked 'why did you do this?' When I did not do something, he never asked 'why didn't you do this?' In terms of character, the Messenger of Allah was the best of all mankind. And I never touched velvet or silk or indeed anything more softer than the palms of the Messenger. And I never smelt any musk perfume or other more fragranced than the natural scent of the Messenger. (*al-Shama'il al-Muhammadiyah*, p. 183)

g. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was never judgemental.

He always gave people a chance. The biggest proof of this is the faith of Umar, Khalid ibn Walid, Mu'awiya and Abu Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with them all). All these figures (including more) were at one time staunch enemies of Islam. It is only because the Messenger was not quick to judge people and he gave people a chance that they all accepted Islam and became great servants of his and Islam.

h. His knowledge.

Because he was taught by Allah, he was the most learned man ever to have existed. Wahb ibn Munabba (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

'I read in seventy-one old scriptures. I learnt in all of them that no human – from the beginning of the universe till its end – has been granted more intelligence or opinion than the Messenger of Allah.'

In another report, he said:

'...The knowledge of the human race from the beginning of time til the end in comparison to the Messenger's is like one particle of sand compared to all the sand in the world.'

Conclusion.

There are some traits that people are born with and there are some traits that people earn. In both, the Messenger (peace be upon him) was perfect. He was perfect and also strived to be perfect.

Further reading.

*A series of talks on al-Shama'il al-Muhammadiyya, by Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi on Youtube (key word search: al-shama'il al-muhammadiyya shaykh yaqoubi)

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