



ASH-SHAMĀ'IL AL-MUḤAMMADIYYA

The Perfect Traits of the Messenger ﷺ

INTRODUCTION

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

a) ḤADĪTH LITERATURE

These are primary works which include everything related to the Messenger ﷺ. For example:

- His sayings, actions and silent approvals.
- His perfect traits (*ash-shamā'il*).

Examples include *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, *Sunan Abu Dā'wūd* and *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*. Collectively, these six collections are called the *Ṣiḥah as-sitta* (The Six Canonical Collection) or *Kutub as-sitta*.

b) SĪRA LITERATURE

These are works which focus exclusively on the life of the Messenger ﷺ, usually in chronological order. Such works will focus less on legal rulings (about *ṣalāh*, *ḡakāh*, *Ḥajj* and so on) and more on his life, actions and contributions.

Examples include *Sīra Ibn Hishām* and *al-Bidāya wa'l Nihāya* [of al-Ḥāfiḡ Ibn Kathīr (774H)]. Many of these works do not start from the birth of the Messenger ﷺ, but the condition and state of Arabia before he appeared. The purpose is to show how much of a difference our Prophet ﷺ made to mankind once he appeared. Also, some works extend to after the life of the Messenger ﷺ to include the biography of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs and beyond.

c) SHAMĀ'IL LITERATURE

These works are focused on describing what the Messenger ﷺ was like, physically and morally.

Examples include *ash-Shamā'il al-Muḡammadiyya* by Imam al-Tirmidhī (279H), *al-Khaṣā'is al-kubrā* by Imam al-Suyūṡī (911H) and *al-Mawāhib al-Laduniyya* by Imam Aḡmad al-Qaṣṡalānī (923H).

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

HUMAN TRAITS

Allah ﷻ has given us all good characteristics, as well as bad ones. Some of us are physically weak but we have been given great wisdom (*ḥikma*) and intellect (*‘aql*). 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 ﷺ. One of Allah’s ﷻ names is *as-Sattār*, which means, the one who covers. Allah ﷻ covers our defects and sins and does not expose them to others. If Allah ﷻ 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 ﷺ (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 ﷺ blessed birth

He was born circumcised and born without an umbilical cord [*ash-Shifā’*, pg. 45]. The use of an umbilical cord: In the placenta, oxygen and nutrients from your bloodstream pass into your baby's bloodstream and are carried to your baby along the umbilical cord. **The Prophet ﷺ did not have an umbilical cord** because he came to give, not to receive. Whilst she was pregnant, his blessed mother Āmina, peace be upon her, would feel fragranced and people would ask her what scent she had applied. It was actually the scent emanating from her beloved son, Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ inside her womb.

b. His ﷺ physical features

He was neither tall nor short.

His hair was neither crisply curled nor straight, 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 complexion, 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 ‘Abbās reports that Allah’s Messenger ﷺ 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 ﷺ smile

‘Abd Allah ibn al-Hārith b. Juz: ‘I never saw anyone smile more than the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.’

Abu Dharr reports that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: ‘Verily, I know the very first person to enter Paradise (*jannah*) and the very last man to exit the fire (to enter Paradise). 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,’ concealing his grave sins. 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 major 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 ﷺ smile so much that his molar teeth became apparent.’

d. His ﷺ Humour

The Prophet ﷺ would find time to joke with his Companions. But even when he joked, it was always truthful.

‘Anas narrates that a man came to the Prophet ﷺ asking for a transporting animal. The Prophet ﷺ 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 ﷺ replied: ‘Every camel gives birth to a child!’

e. His ﷺ scent

His natural scent was more beautiful than musk, perfume. The mother of ‘Anas once bottled the perspiration of the Messenger ﷺ whilst he was sleeping. People would know that the Prophet ﷺ passed by an alley by the scent left behind. Even when he passed away, the same was the case. Mawlā ‘Alī washed the body of the Prophet ﷺ. ‘I expected the smell associated with the dead, but I did not find anything as such. So I said: You were pure, in life and in passing. A beautiful fragrance emitted from him of which I had never smelt before.’ [*ash-Shifā’*, pg. 45]

f. His ﷺ touch

His touch was as soft as velvet. There was no harshness about him whatsoever. ‘Anas said:

‘I served the Messenger of Allah ﷺ for ten years. During that time, he never said, ‘uff’ to me. When I did something, he never asked, ‘Why did you do this?’ When I did not do something, he never said, ‘Why did you not do this?’ In terms of character, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was the greatest of all mankind. I never touched velvet or silk or indeed anything softer than the palms of the Messenger ﷺ. And I never smelt any musk, perfume, more fragranced than the natural scent of the Messenger ﷺ. [*ash-Shamā’il al-Muḥammadiyya*, pg. 183]

g. The Prophet ﷺ was never judgemental

The Prophet ﷺ always gave people a chance. The biggest proof of this is the faith of ‘Umar, Khālīd b. Walīd, Mu‘āviya and Abu Sufyān, may Allah be well-pleased with them all. These noble personalities (amongst others) were at one time staunch enemies of Islam. It is only because the Messenger ﷺ was not quick to judge people and he gave people a chance that they all accepted Islam and became great servants.

h. His ﷺ knowledge

Because he was taught by Allah ﷻ, he was the most learned man ever to have existed. Wahb b. Munabbih 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 ﷺ.’

In another report, he said:

‘...The knowledge of the human race from the beginning of time till the end in comparison to the Messenger’s ﷺ is like a 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 ﷺ was **perfect**. He was perfect and also strived to be perfect.

Further reading

A series of talks on *ash-Shamā’il al-Muḥammadiyya*, by Shaykh Muhammad al-Ya‘qūbī on YouTube (key word search: *al-shamā’il al-muhammadiyya* Shaykh Ya‘qūbī)

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