

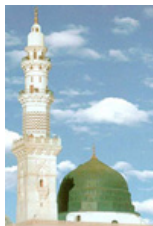
Prophet *of* Mercy



Dr Fiaz Hussain

When God decided (to create) a creation, He wrote a writing which is with Him upon His Throne, namely,
"Verily, My mercy has overtaken My wrath."

(Bukhari)



Preface

If there was one man in history who had so much influence on people around him and those who followed him then this must be the orphan who had no schooling and was born in a town in the midst of a desert. Such was his influence that countless books have been written and numerous seminars and conferences have been organised, but still there is so much to relay about him, his life and his personality. This exceptional man was the final Messenger of God, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

This booklet has been written with the sole purpose of providing a basic introduction to the man who is regarded as an icon of mercy. His example of mercy extends not just to his immediate family and friends, but to his enemies and other creatures of God. A jewel in the crown the Prophet's life is indeed a model for humanity. A number of events and scenarios are presented in the booklet to illustrate this point. Muslims are expected to pass their salutations whenever the Prophet is (and other servants of God are) mentioned in the text. I hope this writing will act as an inspiration to read more about this remarkable human being.

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Mercy in Context

Let us start our journey of understanding and experiencing the most influential human being to have set on this earth by gaining a deeper appreciation of the word that describes him best, namely mercy. There are various definitions for this word that are available to us. This includes providing compassionate treatment especially to those who are under one's authority. Mercy extends to alleviating distress, sorrow and suffering of individuals and their families. The term mercy also means to be kind, tolerant and forgiving, which in turn requires a sense of understanding and awareness for the feelings of others.

Mercy in fact manifests a series of attributes which when combined can result in the condition of being merciful. The act of being merciful and compassionate, however, is something that is not unique to just creatures living on this earth. We have been created by a supreme being who is All-Powerful and All-Merciful – ALLAH *subhana-wata'ala*, God Almighty. His compassion is unimaginable and has no limits. The Arabic words *Rahmaan* and *Raheem* are used to signify this fact. Our Creator continuously showers His creatures with His mercy. This takes various shapes and forms: the way we have been fashioned, been given intelligence and a number of senses to think, reflect and to act. The ultimate mercy that God Almighty has provided for us is that He has presented to us the way to gain eternal salvation. By doing so, our Creator has shown us the way to love Him and to love all His other creatures. In fact, the human act of being kind and considerate is a behaviour pattern that brings us closer to the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.

Since life itself is a blessing, we need to value and employ it in a manner which moves us nearer to other people and to our Creator. This life has an ending, but the life hereafter is eternal. This makes it paramount that we utilise the blessings of life in accordance to the

Most-Merciful. God Almighty has extended His mercy to us through scriptures, books and chosen people. All of these have served a uniform aim of bringing humanity out of the depths of darkness (selfishness, self-indulgence, immorality, etc) and into a system whereby everyone has the same position in front of the one and only Creator. Indeed, if we were to differentiate between people then it can be only done on the basis of the level of closeness to God Almighty. This in turn is measured in terms of how much love there is for the divine guidance and how much love there is in caring and accommodating for the needs of other creatures. In short, love of God Almighty can be quantified in the level of mercy expressed to fellow human beings.

To illuminate the world with kindness and compassion, our Creator provided us with role models. These are rightly known as messengers and prophets. Their task was quite simple and that is to seek acceptance of the mercy of God Almighty and to work towards eliminating pain and suffering of their people through social cohesion and mutual love. This task by no means was as straightforward as it may sound. Prophets had to endure significant affliction to get this simple message across to their folks and rulers. The torment sometimes took the form of being thrown in a fire, sometimes it was that stones were used as body strikes – causing injury and bleeding and sometimes it took the form of economic boycott whereby no trade or food was allowed with non-other than the very people who were promoting the call of the All-Merciful. It is difficult to imagine that such difficulties confronted those whose only goal was to shower fellow humans with love and compassion. Although faced with such odds, the prophets did not dither with their goal and indeed made even greater effort to gain acceptance of the All-Compassionate.

Over time, many people were chosen by God-Almighty to be role models of mercy. This includes Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (May peace and blessings be upon all of them). Some were chosen to enlighten their immediate families and relatives, some their neighbours and those living in the same town, and some their fellow country people or a particular group of people. The goal in each case did not vary, but the scope in which this was delivered was applied according to the needs of the people. The message of mercy would also need to be refreshed from time to time and as such our Creator chose further role models. This same message has been presented to people in the form of

scriptures and books. For example, Abraham was given a series of scriptures, David was presented with *Zabur* (Psalms), Moses with *Toraat* (Torah) and Jesus with *Injeel* (Holy Bible). The purpose of these was to make humanity more God loving and adopt a life of co-existence with fellow human beings that represents mutual respect and care.

We are now living in a time where the role model for us is the last Messenger of God, namely Muhammad. His influence during his presence on earth and since has been well documented by both Muslim and non-Muslim commentators. There are over one billion (1000 million) people living today and residing in all parts of the world who accept him as their role model, even though he lived more than 1400 years ago and no one today who follows him has actually seen him in physical form. His goal of the acceptance of the All-Merciful has illuminated, as we will see, thousands of people during his life and billions of others after his departure. His example of mercy has touched countless lives and continues to shine even greater today.

In fact, his role does not go without recognition by those who research and author work in the area of acceptability and influence. This is true for Muslims, as well as for non-Muslim writers. Michael Hart, for example, in his book "The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History" puts Muhammad at the top of his list.



Prophet in Context

Before moving further and looking at the spectrum of mercy depicted by the Prophet Muhammad, let us take a quick scan of his life. This will enable us to understand the environment and fully value the uniqueness of the person and what he stood for. It will also show up the darkness that surrounded the Prophet and how his mannerism was the beacon of light not just for himself, but for hundreds and thousands who were touched by this light.

In the 6th Century, when Muhammad was born, people around him were mostly deprived of any moral standing or levels of compassion. Women did not have many rights and were seen as objects that were there to satisfy the needs of men. Babies were aborted in the form of being buried alive if they were not the male gender. This was done for mostly economical reasons and because the birth of a girl was seen as something that would lower the status of the family. There was no love or respect for fellow human beings, whether the old or the young or the slaves. People were valued solely on the basis of their position in the society, which in turn was measured by the amount of capital and wealth that they had acquired. There was little to no sign of compassion or forgiveness with groups of people fighting over trivial matters.

The situation, at the time, surrounding Arabia was not much better. People had forgotten about the All-Merciful and now were adoring other handmade objects (so called symbols and images of God). Some were even referring to elements created by our Creator (such as the earth, trees, stones, sky and fire, etc) as if they had a divine heritage. Whilst others had developed a system on which people were being valued not on the basis of human likeness or simply as human beings, but on the principle of cast. This resulted in mercy being applied indiscriminately as those belonging to the higher level of society were spared of blame, whilst at the lower end people were being abused and deprived of any compassion. The word mercy did not exist in all practical terms.

Amidst this darkness, a man emerged who was destined to change everything – not just during his life span, but for centuries to follow. He did not receive any school education and thus was not literate – he could not read or write. He was born an orphan and had lost his mother at the tender age of 6 years. He grew up not with an academic profile, but as a helper to his uncle's trade of selling merchandise. Although encircled by clouds of darkness, he at an early age showed signs that were unique. He did not join the rest in worshipping idols, nor did he entertain immoral entertainment, nor did he participate in drinking intoxicants or partake in lewd parties. His mannerism and behaviour was beginning to blossom as he pursued his wish to help the poor and needy of the society. This, at the time, was unheard of. Indeed, the elders of the society felt uncomfortable with such acts since it was seen as lowering the high status that they had occupied. There was simply no room for being compassionate, merciful or forgiving when it came to people who were less fortunate to them. However, this man was different. He was a role model of mercy, being chosen by the All-Merciful to depict an example of excellence in morals and manners to benefit fellow human beings; irrespective of their position in society.

The man in question is Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him). His example stands exalted since his level of mercy simply increased as he was afflicted with personal difficulties (loss of family members, for example) and abused by those opposing the message of love and equality. The kind-hearted and caring character shined most brightly when in a position of authority, where he chose to forgive rather than to penalise. Even his enemies recognised him as having a better intensity of trust, honesty and truthfulness. His life is an A to Z manual of how to live a life of loving the Almighty and caring for His creation.



Mercy to Children

Many of us relate to being kind and forgiving when it comes to children. We tend to bend backwards to support and help youngsters – sheltering them sometimes from the reality of the materialistic world that we all now live in. The happiness of a young one is something that we all aspire, especially so when he or she is our child. This is something we have been brought up with and something that we want to transfer to the next generation.

At the time of the Prophet, however, things were somewhat different. True, there was the natural love for a child from a parent. The amount of love, if any, varied depending upon whether the child in question was a daughter or a son. The news of a male birth was publicly announced and celebrated. If, however, a daughter was born then it was viewed as a sad day and the family would deem that there was no occasion to rejoice. The Holy Quran, the final testament, depicts the scenario:

And when a daughter is announced to one of them his face becomes black and he is full of wrath. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which is announced to him. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now surely evil is what they judge.

(Holy Quran 16: 58-59)

With this low image of a child, the society as a whole was deprived of the actual meaning of love and affection for children. The Prophet was, however, about to change everything. His endless devotion to accommodating the feelings of young children and championing these are indeed a lesson for us all. The traditions of the Prophet clearly cite the fact that all children are showered with the blessings of the Creator. This is irrespective of gender or the religion of the parents. Indeed, if a

child were to die before reaching maturity he will be in the hands of the All-Merciful and will be granted an eternal life of happiness in the Gardens of Paradise.

The Prophet proclaimed "Act equally between children,...". Sometimes it happens that a parent may not knowingly show favour to a son over another son or daughter. This has been strongly discouraged by the Prophet. In a tradition captured by Abu Da'ud, the importance of equality between children is relayed:

I heard An-Nu'man bin Bashir on the pulpit saying, "My father gave me a gift but 'Amra bint Rawaha (my mother) said that she would not agree to it unless he made ALLAH's Apostle as a witness to it. So, my father went to ALLAH's Apostle and said, 'I have given a gift to my son from 'Amra bint Rawaha, but she ordered me to make you as a witness to it, O ALLAH's Apostle!' ALLAH's Apostle asked, 'Have you given (the like of it) to everyone of your sons?' He replied in the negative. ALLAH's Apostle said, 'Be afraid of ALLAH, and be just to your children.' My father then returned and took back his gift."

Being merciful to children also means to protect them from any foreseen harm or hurt. The Prophet specifically mentioned the night as being an opportunity to do good, or to do bad or to be in state of neutrality. The former is achieved by praising the All-Merciful throughout or part of the night. By going to bed as night falls is seen as being in the state of neutrality as one is not doing anything beneficial to others, but also not causing any discomfort either. If however, an individual decides to enjoy the night by either intoxicating himself or by acting in a manner that acts as a disturbance to others then this is seen as bad and an unwanted state. Realising this important social behaviour, the Prophet instructed that:

"When night falls (or it is evening), keep your children close to you for the devils spread out at that time. But when an hour of the night elapses, you can let them free. Close the doors and mention the Name of ALLAH (God), for Shaytaan (Satan) does not open a closed door."

(Bukhari 4:523)

Bowing, prostrating and praising the Almighty is deemed by all an act that is of the highest order as it brings our bodies and our souls nearer to our Creator. However, even this is truncated by the Prophet on hearing the sound of a child in despair during congregational prayers. His comment here was simply that he did not want the mother of the child to suffer on hearing the anguish cries of the young one. Once again demonstrating the attribute of kindness and thoughtfulness – a man of God, but also a man of people.

On another occasion, the Prophet passed by a number of people and asked, "What are ye?" They said, "We are Muslims." A woman nearby was making a fire blaze for her kettle and she had with her a child, her son. When the fire rose high, she prevented it from touching the child. The Prophet came (to her). She said "Art thou the Prophet of God?" he said, "Yes." She said, "I'll sacrifice my father and mother for thee! Is not God the Most Merciful of those who show mercy?" He said, "Yes." She said, "Verily the mother would never cast her child into the fire." Implying why would God Almighty punish his creation by putting them in the fire of Hell. On hearing this, the Prophet cast down his head, and wept; then he lifted up his head to her, and said, "Verily God punishes none of His servants (that is, God is merciful to all) except the arrogant, the refractory, who rise in rebellion against God and refuse to say that there is no God, but God."

The Prophet took every opportunity to implant the love and affection for the young and innocent members of the community. Tirmidhi, for example, in his writings depicts that the Prophet said the following:

"Whoso strokes the head of an orphan, not stroking it but for God, shall have the merits for each of the hairs over which his hand passes; and whoso does good to an orphan-girl or to an orphan-boy who is with him, I (the Prophet) and he shall be in Paradise like these two-putting together his two fingers."

What a beautiful analogy of the person who cares and shelters children, especially the less fortunate like orphans, will be together with the Prophet not just on the Day of Judgment but also in Paradise. This implies that being merciful to children is a means of attaining the mercy of God Almighty and which in turn is a path towards gaining eternal salvation.



Mercy to Women

Women throughout history have been treated badly. They have been sold and bought. Seen as a household object, women have had next to no rights. For example, they were not entitled to any inheritance. The reality in fact was that women themselves became an object that could be inherited – passed onto another man without her consent. More so, she did not have any choice of who she could or could not marry. Her opinion in this, and other regards, did not count or matter. Apart from treating women as second or no-class citizens, in some parts of the world they had no voting rights and as such no say in choosing their ruler or leader. In other communities, the wife of a deceased husband would be constrained to lose her life as well. Some even blamed our first mother Eve for the original sin and go as far as saying that the pain endured by women during the birth of a child is directly related to the so called original sin. As we can see, women have been painted in an inferior way throughout history by countless nations and cultures.

This treatment and position of women, of course, contravenes the guidance provided to us by the All-Merciful. How can our Creator make the claim that He indeed is the All-Compassionate and All-Merciful if He were to treat His creation in this way? There is no differentiation based on the gender of a creature. All creatures are equally loved and looked after by the Supreme Being, God Almighty.

The fact that women have rights just like other beings on earth was a message that was championed by the chosen role models, including the last Messenger of God. In fact, the Prophet didn't just advocate rights, but excelled the level of women in a manner which is unfounded in history. Women were no longer an object that men used for their purpose, but were given a position of honour, dignity and respect. The burden of sheltering and feeding a family was shifted towards the male member.

The first woman that every human being who is born meets is their mother. No matter where you are born, your mother is the first female gender that comforts you. This comfort is quite unique. She looks after you in your early years – when you are unable to walk or talk. The mother sacrifices her sleep and even her food at the cry of her baby. She is there when you learn to explore the world, by walking and running. The mother is there at all stages of your life. There is this unique bond – the bond of love – which God Almighty has embedded in both the mother and child. It is no wonder then that the Prophet of the All-Merciful should recognise and promote this unique relation:

A person came to ALLAH's Messenger (may peace be upon him) and said: "Who among the people is most deserving of a fine treatment from my hand?" He said: "Your mother." He again said: "Then who (is the next one)?" He said: "Again it is your mother (who deserves the best treatment from you)." He said: "Then who (is the next one)?" He (the Holy Prophet) said: "Again, it is your mother." He (again) said: "Then who?" Thereupon he said: "Then it is your father."

(Muslim 32:6180)

In fact, the position of a mother as entailed by the Prophet goes even further. As human beings, one of our main goals is (and should be if it isn't) to gain the pleasure and love of our Creator. Through this, we hope that we will be forgiven for the errors and mistakes that we made whilst living on this earth. Moreover, we hope to attain salvation and be rewarded with the ultimate accolade of Paradise. Now imagine if we knew a way of getting this whilst living on this earth. I am sure, like me, you would make every effort to firstly find out how to acquire this and secondly how to ensure that this unique formulae was acted upon. Of course, on the contrary, we would say that a person who does not get this or more seriously does not even give thought to gaining this is a person who is deprived of basic reasoning. We would naturally make every sacrifice to attain effectively the key to Paradise. By sacrifice, we mean to give up sleep and rest, to spend resources and time and do whatever is possible to ensure that we get the key to salvation. The Prophet has exemplified the position of a mother in this way by saying:

"Paradise is at the feet of the mother."

(Sunan Ibn Majah 2771)

The second female person a man comes to know is his ultimate partner, his wife. Her role and her position are, of course, somewhat different than the mother, but equally important. The Holy Quran, the final Word of God, verifies the unique union that marriage provides by highlighting its benefit:

He has planted affection and mercy between you.

(Holy Quran 30:12)

It is interesting to note here that God Almighty is the All-Merciful. He has chosen people, namely the prophets, to show us how to live our lives with others. And in this verse, our Creator identifies another way of being merciful. This is an important contribution as in other cultures at the time surrounding the Prophet, women in general and wives in particular were seen by men as transferable objects. Their lifespan with a man (a day, a week, or a month, etc) was only determined by how long the man had a need for her. The bond of marriage is in fact a way showing and demonstrating love, kindness and compassion. Marriage itself is not something that a man uses for his needs only, but a mutually benefiting relation that extends beyond the two people. It is indeed a seed of mercy within a community which provides the basis for a unified and purposeful relationship. This family unit in turn builds a community and a number of diverse communities results in a society. So, the act of marriage blossoms into a society full of love and affection for one another. The Prophet recognising this humanity building relationship stated in his farewell address the following:

“O people, your wives have a certain right over you and you have certain rights over them. Treat them well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers.”

(Tirmidhi)

The third female association that we tend to have is that of a child, namely a daughter. Children in general expect and deserve to be loved by their parents. Although there are incidents even today where neglect and uncaring behaviour is shown by some guardians, the accepted norm is to care for the welfare of a child. This unfortunately was not the case at the time of the Prophet. There was a marked distinction

between a son and a daughter. The son was regarded as being superior and was given the support and encouragement to become effectively the family jewel. The daughter on the other hand, was mostly treated with contempt and was regarded as being unwanted. Because of this, daughters were typically buried alive in order to bring back some honour to the family within the society. This barbaric act was somewhat a norm at the time of the Prophet. This practice and treatment was about to change with the emergence of the Prophet of Mercy. Let us take a couple of glimpses of the guidelines presented by the Prophet on the way we should view and care for daughters:

Aisha (wife of the Prophet) reported: A poor woman came to me along with her daughters. I gave her three dates. She gave a date to each of them and then she took up one date and brought that to her mouth in order to eat that, but her daughters expressed desire to eat it. She then divided the date that she intended to eat between them. This (kind) treatment of her impressed me and I mentioned that which she did to ALLAH's Messenger (may peace be upon him). Thereupon he said: "Verily ALLAH has assured Paradise for her, because of (this act) of her, or He has rescued her from Hell-Fire."

(Sahih Muslim 032:6363)

"He, who brought up two girls properly till they grew up, he and I would come (together) (very closely) on the Day of Resurrection, and he interlaced his fingers (for explaining the point of nearness between him and that person)."

(Sahih Muslim 032:6364)

Having instructions and advice is one thing, but how did the Prophet treat his daughters? Naturally, the Prophet's guidelines are a living example and it therefore should not surprise us that he was as kind hearted and compassionate to his daughters as he was with everyone else. Aisha, the Prophet's wife, recalls: "I have never seen anyone who was closer to the Prophet in conversation, speech or the way they sat than Fatimah (his daughter)."

The Prophet amplified the position of women from unwanted individuals to those building and nourishing a new civilisation. If any man wishes to have salvation and to enter Paradise then he needs to serve a woman – his mother. According to another tradition of the Prophet, he outlined that women will enter Paradise before men and he gave the example of Mary, mother of Jesus, as being the best of all women who will reside on earth.

Discrimination between men and women was erased from the history books by the arrival of the Prophet. There are countless examples of this fact, but the following verse from the final testament of God, the Holy Quran, beautifully summarises some aspects of this:

*Verify men who submit [to ALLAH] and women who submit,
and men who believe and women who believe,
and men who are obedient and women who are obedient,
and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth,
and men who are patient and women who are patient
and men who are humble and women who are humble,
and men who give alms and women who give alms,
and men who fast and women who fast,
and men who guard their modesty and women who guard
(their modesty),
and men who remember ALLAH much and women who
remember,
ALLAH has prepared for them forgiveness and a vast
reward.*

(Holy Quran 33:35)



Mercy to Non-Muslims

Being gracious and caring with your own kind is something, I guess, we could expect from most human beings. When it comes to those who may oppose you or the very system that you are trying to uphold then we may act in a most inappropriate way. This in turns leads to penalising those seen to be in the opposition camp in a subjective manner, instead of allowing the evidence against the individuals being presented in an objective way in a court of law. Doing this, of course, does not lead to co-existence but undermines the principles of equality and justice – a facet of basic human right within any decent society.

The Prophet, his family and his followers (whilst delivering the message of love with the Creator and peace with fellow human beings) were subjected to some unheard of oppression and torture. However, as we will see, the Prophet's slogan was that of mercy and forgiveness even to those who had undertaken such inhuman actions. The slogan has effectively been summarised by Professor Jamal Badawi of St Mary's University (Canada) as:

“If you are not with us, then don't hurt us.”

It was somewhat an unexpected opposition that resulted from the very first day when the Prophet shared this noble message from the All-Merciful. Recognised as the *Al Amin* (the trustworthy) and *As Sadiq* (the truthful) and having lived for 40 years the people knew exactly the personality of the Prophet, but some found it difficult to bow to the light from the All-Compassionate. They had no wish at the time to share any of their wealth and resources to champion the line of mercy towards fellow human beings, especially the orphans, the widows, and the destitute. Indeed, compassion was the last thing that was on the mind of the leaders. They started a campaign of character assassination of the Prophet, labelling him with a series of false names. When this failed

to dim the light of the All-Merciful, they started to persecute the followers of the message.

To understand the extent to which the Prophet and his followers were treated, let us look at some real life examples. The first to suffer were the weak and the helpless in society. Bilal, who had origins in Africa and a close companion of the Prophet, was placed on the scorching hot sand with a large stone on his chest. He had the simple choice of retracting from the way of the All-Compassionate or to be tortured. The words he uttered during this period of difficulty are gems of wisdom for all those who are on the journey to seeking the love of our Creator. The cries of "*Ahad, Ahad, Ahad*" (the One, the One, the One) could be heard from an injured body, but from a heart that is in peace with the All-Merciful.

When justice is offered through eyes of hatred and envy, then even the young, the old and the women are not spared. It is therefore not surprising to see that the torture endured by Bilal was replicated many times over with other bearers of the light of mercy. Some were tortured by stones, some by whips, some by spears and some even with their bodies being dissected by using animals to pull the body apart. Why was this happening? There was only one reason and that was that the leaders at the time were trying to diminish the light of the All-Powerful, the All-Merciful.

The Prophet as well faced a number of challenges. He was barred from praying in a public place and getting covered with filth and being shouted with abusive language was something that the Prophet had to face every time he walked in the streets. There are a number of accounts that we could use to understand the extent to which the Prophet was truly a person of immense compassion and wholeheartedly caring, even, to those that opposed him.

For example, an elderly woman, a non-Muslim, would throw rubbish on him as he walked the path towards his destination. Imagine if this happened to us – what would we say? What would we do? The mercy from God, the Prophet's response was somewhat different. He would silently walk on, brushing off any rubbish that had caught him. There was no sign of any anger or annoyance. This, itself, is an example of how we should treat those who throw hurdles in our way as we deliver the message of the All-Merciful. The story, however, does not end there. One day, as the Prophet walked the same path, he realised

something different. There was no rubbish being thrown on him. At this, if it was us, we would be celebrating the fact that something has happened to the elderly woman and that we have been saved from her usual acts. Well, the Prophet, instead of walking on, was concerned with the health of the elderly woman. He managed to reach her with the help of a neighbour. As he entered her house (after gaining her permission, of course), the elderly woman began to worry. She was thinking of all the days and the times she had been harassing the Prophet. The elderly woman was of the thought that the Prophet came to take revenge as she was now unable to defend herself because of her illness. Not so. The Prophet in fact came to find out what was wrong. He came to offer help and assistance as it is the way of the All-Merciful. The elderly woman was so touched by this act of kindness and concern that she at once accepted the message of peace and mercy.

On another occasion, the Prophet visited a nearby town to share the light of mercy with non-Muslims who resided there. The people there totally ignored him and to make matters worst, started to jeer and stone the Prophet as he was about to leave. With his body badly bleeding, he was chased and pelted out of the town. What hosts? Instead of listening to what the Prophet had to say and then making an informed judgement about the message, they showed arrogance and great pride in undermining the message of mercy. Imagine the sight: you are pelted with stones and your body is aching with pain. Your clothes are torn and stained with blood. Your blood is dripping down the body sides and your sandals are stuck to the underside of your feet due to the sopping of blood. Imagine what you would be thinking and hoping happens to the people who have done this. Being merciful is not just an academic label, but an act of God. It requires that we are compassionate and forgiving at all times, even when we have suffered. The Prophet, the role model of mercy, made two important supplications here. The first was focussing on his effort to enlighten the people with the message of the Almighty. This reads as follows:

"O, my ALLAH! To Thee I complain of the feeble-ness of my strength, of my lack of resources and my being unimportant in the eyes of people. O, Most Merciful of all those capable of showing mercy! Thou art the Lord of the weak, and Thou art my own Lord. To whom art Thou to entrust me; to an unsympathetic foe who would sullenly frown at me, or to an alien to whom Thou hast given control over my affairs? Not in the

least do I care for anything except that I may have Thy protection for myself. I seek shelter in Your light - the light which illuminates the Heavens and dispels all sorts of darkness, and which controls all affairs in this world as well as in the Hereafter. May it never be that I should incur Thy wrath, or that Thou should be displeased with me. I must remove the cause of Thy displeasure till Thou art pleased. There is no strength nor power but through Thee."

What a wonderful prayer at anytime, but when you are soaked with injury and blood it manifests the level of Godly love within the veins of the Prophet. Blaming himself for his weaknesses and shortcomings in not being able to put across the message of the All-Compassionate and seeking His forgiveness.

The second supplication at this occasion was for the people who had just disregarded and had stoned him. The Prophet, again, had no revenge or anger at the unexpected and painful scenario he found himself in. In fact, the Prophet looked positively towards the future and made the following prayer:

"Even if these people do not accept Islam, I do hope from ALLAH that there will be persons from among their progeny who would worship ALLAH and serve His cause."

It may be difficult for us humans, but natural to incline towards compassion and forgiveness when you do not possess the physical strength to act any different. The real test of being kind and considerate towards fellow human beings, regardless of their beliefs, is when one has the authority and the power to do and act as one pleases. This then decides whether one is exercising the merciful way of our Creator or following a route of tyranny and oppression. The Prophet of Mercy exalted even higher when he had any sense of authority. Al Bayhaqi in his scripts relays the request made by Prophet Moses regarding the best person in front of our Creator. He captures this from the companion of the Prophet, Abu Hurayrah, as follows:

Moses said, "O my Lord! Who is the most honoured of Thy servants in Thy sight?" God said, "He who pardons when he has the power (to avenge himself)."

The guidelines for those who rule people are very clear. They are there to serve and to act with equality and compassion. The Prophet championed this line on many occasions as he knew the value of governing and having authority. He has said, recorded in the books of Abu'l-Hasan Muslim, the following:

“Verily the just shall be near to God on pulpits of light, on the right hand of the Merciful (God): those who are just in the exercise of their authority, and to their people, and to those over whom they are made guardians.”

With such teachings, it may not surprise us to learn that when the Prophet had authority over the very people (in his birth city of Mecca) who had earlier tortured and viciously killed the followers of mercy, he chose the side of compassion and forgiveness. This extended to those non-Muslims who had directly abused and caused grave injury to the Prophet. This was a unique point in history where a leader faces the very people who committed some barbaric crimes against him, his family and his followers. Imagine how would we feel if were this leader? Imagine further, how we would react? There are countless examples in history where this situation has arisen and the result has been nothing short of a massacre of all individuals who opposed the leader. This included not just men, but women, the young and the elderly. No life was spared. This blatant killing of helpless people was seen as a victory celebration – to show others their strength and power.

In order to fully grasp the extent of the mercy of the Prophet (as a leader with full authority), let us see what happened when the Prophet entered the city of Mecca. The Prophet addressing his adversaries asked the following question:

“What treatment do you expect from me?”

Before answering the people thought about the Prophet being *Al Amin* and *As Sadiq* and the fact that he was kind hearted. They answered:

“We say well, and we think well: a noble and generous brother, son of a noble and generous brother. It is thine to command.”

Realising their position and the terrible acts that they had undertaken against the people who had accepted the light of mercy, they requested leniency realising that they were helpless and powerless to do otherwise. The Prophet spoke to them in a manner similar to that of Prophet Joseph (son of Prophet Jacob) who spoke to his blood brothers when he was the King of Egypt and they had realised their mistake. His words are a testimony to the depth of mercy that he possessed. The Prophet said:

“Verily I say as my brother Joseph said: This day there shall be no upbraiding of you nor reproach. God forgiveth you, and He is the most Merciful of the merciful.”

These words of Prophet Joseph are recorded in the final word of God – the Holy Quran chapter 12 and verse 92. An exceptional, but not unexpected, similarity between two Prophets of God who had the authority to punish but chose forgiveness and general amnesty. The light of mercy from the All-Powerful and All-Compassionate extends across time and his chosen role models, the Prophets, exercised the side of pardon, forgiveness and prayer. The Prophet has referred to this memorable occasion as:

“The day of mercy.”



Mercy to Prisoners

If we search through history, we will notice that the people to suffer continuously and without any reprieve have been prisoners – especially prisoners of wars. They are at the mercy of those holding them and in just about all cases have been abused. Even if we scan across the world today, the situation is not much better. In fact, in some places, prisoners of war have been deprived of any basic rights with no access to family or legal representation. Furthermore, detainees face torture and exploitation on no other basis than that they hold a certain faith or are viewed as being an adversary. Surprisingly such treatment of prisoners is happening in front of us, in the 21st Century.

Many centuries earlier, however, the Prophet set an example that is as lofty today as it was then. Instead of punishing prisoners of war, they were treated with respect and dignity. The word torture and abuse did not exist with the Prophet or his followers. How could it have? The Prophet came to shelter people with the Mercy of the Almighty, even those who abused him and his companions. The Holy Quran, the Word of God, sets the scene:

And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive: (Saying), "We feed you for the sake of ALLAH alone: no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks.

(Holy Quran 79: 8-9)

Although prisoners of war typically are people who oppose you and make every effort to put hurdles in your way, they are still a creation of the Supreme Being. They may differ in their attitudes and actions towards what one believes to be the correct way. This most definitely should not be used as an excuse to undermine the sanctity of life or a

justification to lower the standard of morality, decency or fair dealing. It is no wonder that the Prophet fully recognised this facet of mercy when he instructed his companions to:

"Free the captives, feed the hungry and pay a visit to the sick."

(Bukhari 52:282)

A memorable event recorded by Bukhari [4372] and Muslim [1764] that demonstrates the ideals of being compassionate to a prisoner is relayed in the story of Thamamah b. Athal al-Hanafi. He was a non-Muslim who was captured in war and taken as a prisoner. Thamamah was taken to a Mosque and restrained as a prisoner. The Prophet approached Thamamah and asked "What have you, O Thamamah?" Seeing that the Prophet was conversing with him, Thamamah took the opportunity to express a way of gaining his freedom. Thamamah replied: "Actually I have a lot going for me. If you kill me, you kill a man whose blood will surely be avenged. If you are generous, then you are generous to a man who knows how to be grateful. If you are after money, then ask of me whatever amount you like." Hearing this, the Prophet left. On the second day, the same question and answer took place. On the third day, the Prophet gave the order to release Thamamah. Although a prisoner of war, the Prophet made sure that he was not mistreated or harmed and was cared for during his confinement.

The story of Thamamah does not end there. After gaining his freedom, he quickly returned after taking a bath to declare: "I bear witness that there is no God but ALLAH and I bear witness that you are the Messenger of ALLAH. O Muhammad! I swear to ALLAH that there was no man on the face of the earth who I hated more than you. Now you have become to me the dearest of men. And I swear by ALLAH that there was no religion on earth more loathsome to me than your religion, but now it is the most beloved to me of all religions. There was no country on earth more despised by me than your country, yet now I love it more than any other country in the world."

It was the Prophet of Mercy who established rights for prisoners. Before this, any person, in any culture, expected to face the horrors of retribution by his enemies. Forget about human rights, a prisoner expected to be tortured to death. The Prophet, however, was a person with a mission to extend compassion and kindness to everyone,

including people who detested him and his mission. Take, for example, when some eighty persons attacked the Muslim camp on the occasion of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. They, however, were captured. The Prophet and his companions were within their rights to question and to penalise the individuals. The Prophet chose the way of the All-Forgiving and released them without compensation or vengeance.

It is the basic level of any civilised society that they treat those who may oppose them in the most humane way. The Prophet living up to the statesman of all time and for all ages, instructed at all occasions that any captives must receive full consideration and care. Recorded by Bukhari [3008], a companion of the Prophet by the name of Jabir tells the occurrence of what happened after the first battle that the Muslims had to face. He says:

"After the Battle of Badr, prisoners of war were brought. Among them was al-Abbas. He did not have a shirt on, so the Prophet (peace be upon him) looked for a shirt for him. It turned out that a shirt of Abdullah b. Ubayy was the right size, so the Prophet gave it to al-Abbas to wear and compensated Abdullah with his own shirt."

Can we imagine such an act happening today? Is there anywhere on earth where prisoners of war are treated with such care and concern? Such a picture, however, is a reality for those who follow the All-Merciful and accept that our return is to Him. This was the character of the Prophet and those who accompanied him.

The prisoners can also expect to be sheltered, whether in a prison cell, a tent, a mosque or even a private home. At the time of the Prophet, there were no dedicated prisons and as such the captives were either kept in the Mosque (as in the case of Thamamah, above) or were circulated among the companions to be restrained in their homes. What a scenario? A person who is your enemy and wants effectively to destroy you is being cared for in your place of worship or in your home. Is there this level of generosity to be found in any part of the world today?

The Prophet also forbade the separation of captives who belonged to the same family. These days, prisoners when captured are quickly divided and not allowed to talk or see each other. This has become a

norm across all cultures, though it opposes basic human rights and natural level of decency. Ahmad [23499], for example, depicts in his writings that such acts were not encouraged and recalls the following instruction about captives from the Prophet:

"Whoever separates a mother from her child will be separated from his own loved ones on the Day of Judgment."

Such was the strength of his devotion to human life that those who followed the Prophet were not just inspired but felt it as a duty to ensure that nobody (Muslim or not) was penalised in any inhumane way. The second Caliph (leader of the Muslims) Umar whilst on his death bed left the following timeless message for his successor:

"I urge him (i.e. the new Caliph) to take care of those non-Muslims who are under the protection of ALLAH and His Apostle in that he should observe the convention agreed upon with them, and fight on their behalf (to secure their safety) and he should not over-tax them beyond their capability."

(Bukhari 52:287)



Mercy to Animals

The aspect of being kind and considerate should not be limited or constrained to human beings only. God Almighty has created millions of creatures, some we know about and some yet to be discovered. The sign of a person claiming to be merciful and caring needs to include respect and dignity to all creatures of God on earth. The treatment of animals and other species is as paramount as to the way we address and relate to other human beings. The mercy of the Prophet extended beyond praying and caring for humans. He sensed the feelings of all creatures and when the moment came, he took the side of comforting and alleviating the despair a creature of God may be experiencing. Furthermore, he educated his followers towards being more compassionate and heedful about the needs of the creatures of our Creator. This, for example, included the fact that animals should not be slaughtered for pleasure or killed as peripheral occurrences during the cause of a conflict.

With many showing little to no respect to children and women, it is not surprising to learn that many people were extremely unkind to animals. They used to treat the animals harshly and practised the tasteless act of cutting pieces off an animal whilst it was still alive. Such unacceptable behaviour, like many other inhuman acts, was about to change with the arrival of the Prophet of Mercy. He instituted the message that just like human beings, animals and creatures of God Almighty have certain rights. This message at the time was quite novel as animals were seen as a secondary creature and in some beliefs around the world it was regarded as a form that human took after their death because of their bad deeds. With such misconceptions in the heads of people, it was no doubt a challenge for the Prophet of Mercy to change a society based around greed and cruelty to love and forgiveness – for both to fellow human beings and for other creatures of our Creator.

Let us look at what the final word of God, the Holy Quran, says when talking about animals and creatures on our earth. This will help us in understanding the purpose of the animals and how they relate to our Creator. In doing so, God Almighty is emphasising the value of all His creatures to us human beings. The All-Merciful says:

There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you. Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord in the end.

(Holy Quran 6:38)

There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance dependeth on ALLAH: He knoweth the time and place of its definite abode and its temporary deposit: All is in a clear Record.

(Holy Quran 11:6)

And ALLAH has created every animal from water: of them there are some that creep on their bellies; some that walk on two legs; and some that walk on four. ALLAH creates what He wills for verily ALLAH has power over all things.

(Holy Quran 24:45)

Hast thou not seen that unto ALLAH payeth adoration whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is in the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the hills, and the trees, and the beasts, and many of mankind,...

(Holy Quran 22:18)

He created the heavens without any pillars that ye can see; He set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you; and He scattered through it beasts of all kinds. We send down rain from the sky, and produce on the earth every kind of noble creature, in pairs.

(Holy Quran 31:10)

And in the creation of yourselves and the fact that animals are scattered (through the earth), are Signs for those of assured Faith.

(Holy Quran 45:4)

These verses from the final testament of God illustrate the powerful purpose that our Creator places on all His creation and the important role animals play in this vast universe. The All-Merciful entrusted the message of love and compassion to His creation by means of the chosen role models – the prophets.

To get an idea of how kind-hearted the Prophet was to other creatures of God, let us look at some scenarios presented to the Prophet by the people who were with him:

“One who kills even a sparrow or anything smaller, without a justifiable reason, will be answerable to God.” When asked what would be a justifiable reason, he (the Prophet) replied, “To slaughter it for food – not to kill and discard it”

(Ahmad)

We can see from this that killing another creature for fun or sport is not encouraged. In fact, the Prophet has also prohibited the use of animals for target practice like throwing stones. The Prophet here is commented to have said the following:

“Even if it does not kill or bleed, it may harm their eyes and teeth”

(Muslim)

The Prophet went even further to ensure that the message of caring and looking after animals reached the hearts of people. This time, he linked being merciful to attaining salvation. The Prophet has said:

“He shall not enter into Paradise who ill treats those under his possession”

(Tirmidhi)

There are many occasions where the Prophet shined the light of his mercy on his followers. For example, once the Prophet was on a journey with his companions and they stopped for rest at a certain place. A bird had laid an egg there. A man took away the egg and the bird began beating her wings in a state of great distress. The Prophet enquired who had hurt her by taking her egg. When the man admitted that he had done that, the Prophet asked him to return the egg to the nest.

Abu Da'ud, in his book, captures the instance of the crying camel that approached the Prophet. He writes:

Once when the Prophet happened to be in a garden belonging to one of the Ansar (resident of Medina), a camel came to the Prophet, and sobbed bitterly and his eyes shed tears. The Prophet went up to him, and stroked his head, and the camel paused. The Prophet said, "Who is the master of this camel?" A young man of the Ansar said, "It is mine, O Prophet of God!" The Prophet said, "Dost thou not fear God with regard to his brute beast which God has given thee to possess? It complains to me that thou dost oppress him and fatigue him."

The Prophet took every opportunity to spread and distribute the light of mercy amongst his followers. Bukhari, in his scripts, recalls the story of a thirsty man and a dog that was relayed by the Prophet to his companions:

There was a man who went on a journey and on his way felt very thirsty. He found a well and went down into it and drank water. When he came out of the well he saw a dog who was also very thirsty and was holding his tongue out and licking the ground. Thinking that the animal was thirsty like him, he again went down into the well, filled his leather socks with water and gave it to the dog. For this act of his, God was grateful to him, and pardoned him (his sins). The companions said "O Prophet of God! Have we any reward (for our acts) in regard to animals?" The Prophet

said, "There is reward (for every good act done) in regard to every heart fresh of life."

He, the Prophet, instilled some gems of mercy in the hearts of his companions by giving them nuggets of wisdom. Take, for example, the following short guideline which tends to summarise his message:

"If you want to be loved by your Creator,
love His creatures"

(Tirmidhi)



Mercy to the Worlds

With just a few words, we have tasted the person who changed the fortunes of humanity with his kind-heartedness and his forgiving ways. All around him, in his country and in other cultures people were being graded in terms of their wealth or their gender or their ancestry. Those who were weak or needy, like orphans and widows were looked down upon. The women did not have any rights and men were discriminated against based on their colour, origin and family. There was no respect for fellow humans or other creatures of God and everyone lived for themselves. Out of this darkness, emerged a light who carried with him the divine light of the All-Merciful. His message of accepting the All-Compassionate and sharing the mercy of God with everyone was a message not for a few people, but for all humanity.

The Prophet emphasised the need to care for one another. To respect and support the weakest in society. He showed the way forward with equality of genders – giving the key to eternal salvation to the mother. The Prophet highlighted the importance of showing value and honour to people of other faith. He demonstrated that animals and species are all creatures of the Creator and should be treated with dignity. His message of mercy and love has reached millions of people across the globe. His contribution is recognised even by his foes. The Prophet is indeed a world leader in transmitting this much needed message of togetherness in praising the All-Merciful. His light of mercy has crossed not just countries and cultures, but time as well. The light has strengthened over time as more and more people understand that humanity can only live in peace when we begin to love God Almighty and care for His creatures.

The message and scope of the Prophet is eloquently manifested by our Creator in the final testament of God, the Holy Quran, by these words:

And We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds.

(Holy Quran 21: 107)