

**The Holy Prophet Muhammad as a “mercy to the worlds”  
and the stories of the cat, dog, camel, bird, hen and ant  
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The Holy Quran says:

- “And We have not sent you (O Prophet) but as a mercy to the nations (*rahmat-un lil-`alamin*).” (21:107)
- “And surely you (O Prophet) have sublime morals (*khuluq-in `azim*).” (68:4)
- “Thus it is by Allah’s mercy that you are gentle to them. And if you had been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you.” (3:159)
- “Certainly you (O Muslims) have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Last day, and remembers Allah much.” (33:21)

Below I have collected some Hadith reports to illustrate certain aspects of the character of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, particularly in regard to what he did for other human beings.\*

**As a mercy**

- “It was said to the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him): Invoke curse upon the idol-worshippers, whereupon he said: **I have not been sent as the invoker of curse, but I have been sent as a mercy.**” (Sahih Muslim, [www.sunnah.com/muslim/45/111](http://www.sunnah.com/muslim/45/111))
- The Holy Prophet Muhammad expressed his worry and concern that he might, as a human being, in anger express a bad wish for someone. Would that be considered as his prayer and his desire for that person in the eyes of God? He said:

“I have made this arrangement with my Lord, that I said to Him: I am a human being and I am pleased just as a human being is pleased and I lose my temper just as a human being loses temper. So for any person from amongst my followers whom I curse and who in no way deserves it, let that, O Lord, turn into a source of purification and purity and nearness to Allah on the Day of Resurrection.” (Sahih Muslim, [www.sunnah.com/muslim/45/124](http://www.sunnah.com/muslim/45/124))

So if he were to curse one of his followers undeservedly, God would not treat his words as expressing what he wants to happen to that follower, but He would convert them into a prayer for the good of that person.

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\* Translations of all Hadith reports, except those from *Mishkat al-Masabih*, are based on the English translations at the online Hadith resource [www.sunnah.com](http://www.sunnah.com). I have amended these translations when necessary to correct misprints and for better clarity. Reports from *Mishkat al-Masabih* quoted here have been translated by myself and refer to the edition with Urdu translation by Maulana Abdul Hakim Khan Akhtar, Lahore, 1985.

### Condemns racial verbal abuse

- A Companion reported: "I met Abu Dharr at Rabadhah and he wore a garment and his slave wore a (similar) garment. I questioned him about it. He said:

I abused a man and called him by a bad name on account of his mother; so the Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be on him, said to me: O Abu Dharr! Did you call him by a bad name on account of his mother; indeed you have in you ignorance." (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/2/23](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/2/23))

Abu Dharr had used the words *Ibn al-sauda*, or son of a black woman, regarding his servant or slave; and as these words were used contemptuously, they were considered an abuse of one Muslim by another, which was an act of ignorance or unbelief.

- Safiyyah was a wife of the Holy Prophet who was a Jew. Hafsa, a wife of the Holy Prophet from his own tribe of the Quraish, once described Safiyyah as "daughter of a Jew":

"The news reached Safiyyah that Hafsa said: 'The daughter of a Jew', so she wept. Then the Prophet came to her while she was crying, so he said: 'What makes you cry?' She said: 'Hafsa said to me that I am the daughter of a Jew.' So the Prophet said: 'And you are the daughter of a Prophet, and your uncle is a Prophet, and you are married to a Prophet, so what is she boasting to you about?' Then he said: 'Fear Allah, O Hafsa'." (Tirmidhi, [www.sunnah.com/urn/637820](http://www.sunnah.com/urn/637820))

According to another version of this report, the Holy Prophet's wives Hazrat Aishah and Hazrat Hafsa (daughters of Hazrat Abu Bakr and Umar) had said about Safiyyah: "We are more honoured to the Messenger of Allah than her," and "We are the wives of the Prophet and his cousins". Upon this, the Holy Prophet said to Safiyyah:

"Why did you not say (to them): How can you be better than me when my husband is Muhammad, my father is Aaron, and my uncle is Moses?" (Tirmidhi, [www.sunnah.com/urn/637800](http://www.sunnah.com/urn/637800))

The Holy Prophet was asking Safiyyah to tell Hafsa and Aishah (God be pleased with them all) that she was related to three prophets, to two of them by descent and to one by marriage, while they were related to only one prophet!

- It is reported from Aishah: "The camel of Safiyyah was fatigued, and Zainab had a surplus mount. The Messenger of Allah said to Zainab: Give her the camel. She said: Should I give to that Jewess? Thereupon the Messenger of Allah became angry and kept away from her during (the months of) Dhu al-Hijjah, Muharram, and a part of Safar." (Abu Dawud, [www.sunnah.com/abudawud/42/7](http://www.sunnah.com/abudawud/42/7))

These events show that the Holy Prophet Muhammad severely disapproved of using racial epithets and reprimanded his own followers and his own wives for using such abusive terms.

### **Justice towards those of other religions**

- “Two men, a Muslim and a Jew, quarrelled. The Muslim said: ‘By Him Who gave Muhammad superiority over all the people!’ The Jew said: ‘By Him Who gave Moses superiority over all the people!’ At that the Muslim raised his hand and slapped the Jew on the face. The Jew went to the Prophet and informed him of what had happened between him and the Muslim. The Prophet sent for the Muslim and asked him about it. The Muslim informed him of the event. The Prophet said: **Do not give me superiority over Moses.**” (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/44/2](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/44/2))

There are several versions of this incident. Another is as follows:

“Once while a Jew was selling something, he was offered a price that he was not pleased with. So he said: No, by Him Who gave Moses superiority over all human beings! Hearing him, an Ansari man got up and slapped him on the face and said: You say, By Him Who gave Moses superiority over all human beings, although the Prophet (Muhammad) is present amongst us! The Jew went to the Prophet and said: O Abu-l-Qasim! I am under the assurance and contract of security, so what right does so-and-so have to slap me? The Prophet asked the other: Why have you slapped him? He told him the whole story. The Prophet became angry, till anger appeared on his face, and said: **Do not give superiority to any prophet amongst Allah’s Prophets.**” (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/60/87](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/60/87))

This does not mean that the Holy Prophet is telling us not to regard him as superior to all other prophets. It means that we should not make it a matter of dispute and quarrel with people of other religions. Such a heated argument might lead a Muslim to find faults in another prophet, and to offend his followers. A point to note here is that the Jew, living under the protection of the Muslim rule of Madinah, took his complaint to the Holy Prophet Muhammad as he had confidence in him that he would do justice.

- A Jewish scholar had lent some money to the Prophet Muhammad. He demanded it back. The Prophet said: I have no money that I can give you. He said: Muhammad, I will not leave from here until you pay what you owe me. The Prophet said: All right, I will stay with you. So he remained with him through the *Zuhr*, *Asr*, *Maghrib* and *Isha* prayers, and the next morning’s *Fajr* prayers. His Companions threatened the Jew and told him they would throw him out. When the Holy Prophet saw this, he stopped them. They said: O Messenger of Allah, Can a Jew hold you up? He said: **Allah has forbidden me to do injustice to anyone who is under our compact of security, and such people.**

As the day rose, the Jew said: ‘I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah. I give a half of my property in the way of Allah. I swear by Allah that I did what I did only because I was testing you to see if the qualities that are recorded in the Torah about the promised prophet are found in you or not. It says: ... He will not be abusive in language nor hard-hearted, nor will he shout loudly in the streets, nor will he indulge in foul talk ... Here is my property. You may give any order with regard to it.’ (Mishkat, *Kitab-ul-Fitan*, ch. ‘Morals and habits of the Holy Prophet’, sec. 3; vol. 3, p. 142)

The Holy Prophet’s statement, “Allah has forbidden me to do injustice...”, and his behaviour, show how scrupulously he safeguarded the rights of non-Muslims.

### What the Prophet did for women

- “The Prophet said: If anyone has a female child, and **does not bury her alive, nor humiliate her, nor prefer his children (i.e., the male ones) to her**, Allah will bring him into Paradise.” (Abu Dawud, [www.sunnah.com/abudawud/43/374](http://www.sunnah.com/abudawud/43/374))
- “When Abu Bakr asked the permission of the Prophet to come in, he heard Aishah speaking in a loud voice. So when he entered, he caught hold of her in order to slap her, and said: Do I see you raising your voice to the Messenger of Allah? The Prophet began to prevent him and Abu Bakr went out angry. The Prophet said when Abu Bakr went out: **You see I rescued you from the man**. Abu Bakr waited for some days, then asked permission of the Messenger of Allah to enter, and found that they had made peace with each other. He said to them: Bring me into your peace as you brought me into your war. The Prophet said: We have done so, we have done so.” (Abu Dawud, [www.sunnah.com/abudawud/43/227](http://www.sunnah.com/abudawud/43/227))

The Holy Prophet protected his wife Aishah, who was talking to him impudently, from being slapped by her father Abu Bakr for this insolence. The natural reaction, even of a husband today, might be to let his wife’s father discipline her.

- “Abdullah ibn Umar (son of Hazrat Umar) said: I heard the Messenger of Allah say, Don’t prevent your women from going to the mosque when they seek your permission. Bilal, son of Abdullah, said: By Allah, we shall certainly prevent them. On this Abdullah ibn Umar turned towards him and reprimanded him so harshly as I (the reporter) had never heard him do before. He said: I am narrating to you that which comes from the Messenger of Allah and you (have the audacity to) say: By Allah, we shall certainly prevent them.” (Sahih Muslim, [www.sunnah.com/muslim/4/151](http://www.sunnah.com/muslim/4/151))

This incident shows how, even as early as the time of the next generation after the Companions, some Muslims were already trying to reverse and undo the rights given to women by the Holy Prophet.

*Abolition of practice of forced marriage of women 1400 years ago:*

- "A woman from the offspring of Ja'far was afraid lest her guardian marry her (to somebody) against her will. So she sent for two elderly men from the Ansar, Abdur Rahman and Mujammi, the two sons of Jariya, and they said to her: Don't be afraid, for Khansa, daughter of Khidam, was given by her father in marriage against her will, then the Prophet cancelled that marriage." (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/90/16](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/90/16))
- "A girl came to the Prophet and said: My father married me to his brother's son so that he might raise his status thereby. The Prophet gave her the choice (to accept or reject), and she said: I approve of what my father did, but I wanted women to know that their fathers have no right to do that." (Ibn Majah, [www.sunnah.com/urn/1261920](http://www.sunnah.com/urn/1261920))
- "A virgin girl came to the Prophet and told him that her father arranged a marriage that she did not like, and the Prophet gave her the choice (in the matter)." (Ibn Majah, [www.sunnah.com/urn/1261930](http://www.sunnah.com/urn/1261930))

### **Treatment of animals**

There is a chapter in Sahih Bukhari entitled 'The superiority of (the good deed of) providing water'. Three reports occur in it, all relating to providing water to thirsty animals:

- "Allah's Messenger said: 'While a man was walking he felt thirsty and went down a well and drank water from it. On coming out of it, he saw **a dog** panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said: This (dog) is suffering from the same problem as me. So he (went down the well) filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth and climbed up and watered the dog. **Allah thanked him for that deed and forgave him.**' The people asked: O Messenger of Allah, Is there a reward for us in serving the animals? He said: For every creature having a liver fresh with life, there is a reward (for serving it)." (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/42/11](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/42/11))
- In the other two reports, it is stated that the Holy Prophet said that during a prayer he was shown hell very close up in a vision. He saw in it a woman who "was put in Hell because of **a cat** which she had kept locked till it died of hunger." The Holy Prophet added that **Allah said to the woman:** "You neither fed it nor watered when you locked it up, nor did you set it free to eat the insects of the earth." (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/42/12](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/42/12) and [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/42/13](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/42/13))
- "Abu Hurairah reported the Prophet as saying: A prostitute saw **a dog** moving around a well on a hot day and hanging out its tongue because of thirst. She drew water for it in her shoe and she was pardoned (for this act of hers)." (Sahih Muslim, [www.sunnah.com/muslim/39/211](http://www.sunnah.com/muslim/39/211))

The above reports show that, not only is it an evil act to torture an animal or deprive it of its necessities, but it is a virtuous, recommended act, positively to treat animals well and to provide them with their natural needs.

- "He (Holy Prophet Muhammad) entered the garden of a man from the Ansar. All of a sudden when a camel saw the Prophet it wept tenderly, producing a yearning sound and its eyes flowed. The Prophet came to it and wiped the temple of its head. So it kept silence. He then said: Who is the master of this camel? Whose camel is this? A young man from the Ansar came and said: This is mine, Messenger of Allah. He said: Don't you fear Allah about this beast which Allah has given in your possession? It has complained to me that you keep it hungry and load it heavily which fatigues it." (Abu Dawud, [www.sunnah.com/abudawud/15/73](http://www.sunnah.com/abudawud/15/73))

The above report is contained in a chapter in Abu Dawud entitled: *What Has Been Commanded Regarding Proper Care For Riding Beasts And Cattle.*

- Ibn Umar (son of Hazrat Umar) went to see someone and he came across that man's son who had tied a hen to shoot things at it. The report says: "Ibn Umar walked to it and untied it. Then he brought it and the boy (to the father) and said: Prevent your boys from tying birds for the sake of killing them, as **I have heard the Prophet forbidding the killing of an animal or other living thing after tying them.**" (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/72/40](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/72/40))
- Ibn Umar also said: "The Prophet cursed the one who did *muthla* to an animal (i.e., cut off its limbs or some other part of its body while it is still alive)." (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/72/42](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/72/42))
- "We were with the Messenger of Allah during a journey. He went to ease himself. We saw a bird with her two young ones and we captured her young ones. The bird came and began to spread its wings. The Messenger of Allah came and said: 'Who distressed her for its young ones? Return its young ones to it.' He also saw an ant colony that we had burnt. He asked: Who has burnt this? We replied: We. He said: It is not proper for anyone to punish with fire, except for the Lord of fire." (Abu Dawud, [www.sunnah.com/abudawud/15/199](http://www.sunnah.com/abudawud/15/199))
- "The Messenger of Allah said: Once while a prophet of the prophets (of Allah) was taking a rest underneath a tree, an ant bit him. He, therefore, ordered that his luggage be taken away from underneath that tree and then ordered that the dwelling place of the ants should be set on fire. Allah sent him a revelation: 'Wouldn't it have been sufficient to burn a single ant?' " (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/59/125](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/59/125))

In another version of this report it is stated that Allah revealed to him: "Because one ant bit you, you have destroyed a (whole) community from among the communities which glorify Allah" (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/56/228](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/56/228)). This is an allusion to statements in the Quran such as: "Do you not see that Allah is He Whom do glorify all those who are in the heavens and the earth, and the birds with wings outspread? Each one knows its

prayer and its glorification" (24:41). According to the Quran, all species are communities, as are human beings, and they all have the right of existence: "And there is no animal in the earth, nor a bird that flies on its two wings, but are communities like yourselves" (6:38).

### Humility of the Prophet

- "A man came to the Messenger of Allah and said (addressing him as): 'O the best of creation!' Thereupon the Messenger of Allah said: That is Abraham, peace be upon him." (Sahih Muslim, [www.sunnah.com/muslim/43/196](http://www.sunnah.com/muslim/43/196))
- "Umar said: I heard the Prophet saying, 'Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a servant of Allah. So call me the servant of Allah and His Messenger.'" (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/60/115](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/60/115))
- "One day the Messenger of Allah was performing *wudu* (ablution before prayer). His Companions started rubbing the water dropping from his *wudu* on their own bodies. The Messenger of Allah asked: Why are you doing this? They replied: Because of love for Allah and His Messenger. He said: He who wishes to love Allah and His Messenger, or wishes that Allah and His Messenger love him, should speak the truth when he talks, faithfully return anything that he is entrusted with, and fulfil the rights of his neighbour." (Mishkat, *Kitab-ul-Adab*, ch. Love and mercy for the creation, v. 2, p. 458)

The Holy Prophet here teaches that true love for Allah and His Messenger is not expressed, or attained, by venerating him bodily, by attaching sacredness to whatever has touched his body. That love is expressed and attained by displaying good morals such as those mentioned.

### Avoiding applying punishment if possible

- "While I was with the Prophet, a man came and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, I have committed a sin which is subject to legal punishment (*hadd*), so inflict it on me.' The Prophet did not ask him what he had done. Then the time for the prayer came and the man offered prayer along with the Prophet, and when the Prophet had finished his prayer, the man again got up and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I have committed a sin subject to legal punishment (*hadd*), so inflict on me what is in the Book of Allah.' The Prophet said: 'Have you not prayed with us?' He said: 'Yes.' The Prophet said: 'Allah has forgiven your sin', or he said: 'your punishment'." (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/86/52](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/86/52); see also Abu Dawud, [www.sunnah.com/abudawud/40/31](http://www.sunnah.com/abudawud/40/31))

The Holy Prophet always discouraged people from confessing to sins for which a legal punishment would be required to be applied. So he did not wish the man to go further into what he had done, and indicated to him that he should seek forgiveness of Allah in

prayer. Note that, whatever was the man's sin, there was no other injured party who suffered due to that man; otherwise he would be accountable for the harm he caused.

- "A man came to the Prophet and confessed to him that he had committed *zina* (out of wedlock sexual intercourse) with a woman, whom he named. The Messenger of Allah sent word to the woman asking her about that, and she denied that she had committed *zina*, so he flogged him in accordance with the legal punishment and left her alone." (Abu Dawud, [www.sunnah.com/abudawud/40/116](http://www.sunnah.com/abudawud/40/116))

The confession made by the man and the denial made by the woman were treated as of equal validity, and the Prophet acted towards each of them according to that person's own statement.

- "A man came to the Prophet and said: I made sexual contact with a woman at the furthest part of the city, and I did with her everything except sexual intercourse. So here I am; do with me as you wish. Umar said: Allah has concealed your fault, it would have been better if you also had concealed it yourself. The Prophet gave no reply, so the man went away. The Prophet sent a man after him, and (when he came) he recited the verse: "And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night. . ." up to the end of the verse. A man among the people asked: Is it particular to him, Messenger of Allah, or for the people in general? He replied: It is for all the people." (Abu Dawud, [www.sunnah.com/abudawud/40/118](http://www.sunnah.com/abudawud/40/118))

Here we see Hazrat Umar discouraging someone from revealing their own fault. In this instance, the man had remained short of committing the act of *zina*. The verse of the Quran referred to here is the following: "And keep up prayer at the two ends of the day and in the first hours of the night. Surely good deeds take away evil deeds. This is a reminder for the mindful" (11:114). Thus the Prophet advised recourse to regular prayer, as a means of giving up evil deeds. Again, it appears that whatever took place between the man and the woman was by mutual consent.

- "The Messenger of Allah said: Forgive the infliction of prescribed penalties among yourselves, for any prescribed penalty of which I hear must be carried out." (Abu Dawud, [www.sunnah.com/abudawud/40/26](http://www.sunnah.com/abudawud/40/26))

This seems to be related to the incident when a man, while asleep, had his cloak stolen from under him. He caught the thief and took him to the Holy Prophet. But then he offered, before the Holy Prophet, to let the thief keep the cloak and owe him its price. The Holy Prophet said that, if he wanted to do that, he should have said it before, instead of bringing him for punishment (see Sunan Nasa'i, Book of 'Cutting off the hand of the Thief'). The report quoted above teaches the principle that people can settle disputes among themselves by mutual agreement, avoiding the application of legal

punishments. The legal authorities can only act to punish someone if a complaint is brought to them by a victim or a witness.

### Miscellaneous

- "A man said: O Messenger of Allah, there is a woman who is well-known for her **excessive** amount of praying, fasting and giving in charity, but she hurts her neighbour with her tongue. The Holy Prophet said: She will be in the fire of hell. The man said: O Messenger of Allah, there is a woman who is well-known for her **small** amount of praying, fasting and giving in charity, and gives only a few pieces of cheese in charity, but she does not hurt her neighbour with her tongue. The Holy Prophet said: She will be in paradise." (Mishkat, *Kitab-ul-Adab*, ch. Love and mercy for the creation, v. 2, p. 458)
- "A man abused Abu Bakr while the Holy Prophet was sitting there. The Holy Prophet listened with surprise and was smiling. (Abu Bakr remained silent.) When the man became worse in his abuse, Abu Bakr answered some of it. The Holy Prophet became angry and got up and left. Abu Bakr went to him and said: O Messenger of Allah, when he was abusing me, you sat there, but when I replied to him, you were angry and left. The Holy Prophet said: There was an angel with you replying to him (when you were silent), but when you started replying yourself, the devil appeared." (Mishkat, v. 2, p. 477)

The "angel replying" really means, not that an angel was replying to the abuser in words, but that Hazrat Abu Bakr's behaviour in remaining silent in a dignified manner was itself angelic conduct which was a sufficient reply to the abuse. When Hazrat Abu Bakr lost his temper and started replying, that was more worthy of the devil's behaviour.

- "A man asked permission to enter upon the Prophet. When the Prophet saw him (from a distance), he said (to his wife Aishah): What an evil brother of his tribe! And what an evil son of his tribe! When that man sat down, the Prophet behaved with him in a nice and polite manner and was completely at ease with him. When that person had left, Aishah said: O Messenger of Allah! When you saw that man, you said so-and-so about him, but then you showed him a kind and polite behaviour, and you enjoyed his company? The Messenger of Allah said: O Aishah! Have you ever seen me speaking in rude language? (Remember that) the worst people in Allah's sight on the Day of Resurrection will be those whom the people avoid to be away from their evil." (Bukhari, [www.sunnah.com/bukhari/78/62](http://www.sunnah.com/bukhari/78/62))

In another version the Holy Prophet said: "The one who will have the worst position in Allah's estimation on the Day of Resurrection will be the one whom, in this life, people avoided for fear of his rude language."

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