

Reflection on The Prophet's Life



Excerpts from “In the Footsteps of the Prophet” by Tariq Ramadan



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Excerpts from "In the Footsteps of the Prophet"

by Tariq Ramadan¹

Verily, there has come to You a Messenger (Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him) from amongst yourselves, it grieves Him that You should receive any injury or difficulty. He is anxious over You (for your well-being), for the believers (He is) the most kind and compassionate.

(At-Taubah verse 128)

The life of the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) is a source of shining guidance and full of powerful lessons for Muslims in different places and times. Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) exemplifies the strong and profound relationship that each human being ought to have with his Creator, his fellow human beings, and the world around him.

As we commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) on the 12th of Rabi'ul Awwal, let us reflect on his shining life and honourable personality, and follow in his footsteps to become religiously profound and socially progressive Muslims who are blessings to all.

In Tariq Ramadan's book, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, we find examples of the Prophet's life that reinforce the critical values that form the foundation of our Singaporean Muslim Identity (SMI). These values call upon us to be **Religiously resilient, Inclusive, Contributive, Adaptive** and **Progressive**. These are values which will guide us to become the Prophet's ummah that serves as a model community.

¹ Ramadan, Tariq. *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*. Oxford University Press. 2007.

To Be Religiously Resilient

Throughout the twenty-three years of his mission, the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) sought the way to spiritual freedom and liberation.

He prayed while the world of humans was asleep, he invoked God while his brothers and sisters despaired, and he remained patient and steadfast in the face of adversity and insult while so many beings turned away.

The Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) was able to express love and spread it around him. His wives were gratified by his presence, tenderness, and affection, and his Companions loved him with an intense, profound, and extraordinarily generous love. He gave and offered his presence, his smiles, his being, and if a slave happened to address him or wanted to take him to the other end of the city, he went, he listened, he loved.

He loved, he forgave. Everyday, he begged God to forgive his own failings and oversights, and when a woman or a man came to him burdened with a mistake, however serious, he received that soul and showed her or him the way to forgiveness, solace, dialogue with God, and the Most Gentle's protection. (*pgs. 211-212*)



He was beloved by God and an example among humans. He prayed, he contemplated. He love, he gave. He served, he transformed. The Prophet was the light that leads to Light, and in learning from his life, believers return to the Source of Life and find His light, His warmth, and His love. The Messenger may have left the human world, but he has taught us never to forget Him, the Supreme Refuge, the Witness, the Most Near. Bearing witness that there is no god but God is, in effect, stepping toward deep and authentic freedom; recognizing the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) as the Messenger is essentially learning to love him in his absence and to love Him in His presence. Loving, and learning to love: God, the Prophet, the creation, and humankind. (*pg 216*)



To Be Religiously Resilient Through A Profound Relationship with The Creator

The Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) hated to let his Companions nurture a pointless feeling of guilt. He kept telling them that they must never stop conversing with the One, the Most Kind, the Most Merciful, who welcomes everyone in His grace and benevolence and who loves the sincerity of hearts that regret their misdeeds and return to Him. This is the profound meaning of at-tawbah, offered to everyone: sincerely returning to God after a slip, a mistake, a sin. God loves that sincere return to Him and He forgives and purifies. The Prophet himself exemplified that in many circumstances. (pg 113)



The Prophet went to the town of Taif and spoke to the leaders of the Thaqif tribe, hoping that they would hear the message of Islam and agree to protect the Muslims from their enemies. He met with a very cold reception, however, and the chiefs mocked his claim to be a prophet. Alone, having found no protection among his fellow human beings, he turned toward the One and prayed:

“O God, to You alone I complain of my weakness, the meagerness of my resources and my insignificance before men. O Most Merciful of the Merciful, You are the Lord of the weak and You are my Lord [Rabb, “Educator”]. Into whose hands do You entrust me? To some remote stranger who will ill-treat me? Or to an enemy to whom You have granted authority over my affairs? I harbor no fear so long as You are not angry with me. Yet Your gracious support would open a broader way and a wider horizon for me! I seek refuge in the light of Your face, by which all darkness is illuminated and the things of this world and the next are set aright, so that I do not incur Your anger and am not touched by Your wrath. Nevertheless, it is Your prerogative to admonish as long as You are not satisfied. There is no power nor strength but in You.” (pgs. 68- 69)



The Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) remained mindful to the small details of life and of the expectations of those around him, constantly allying rigor and the generosity of fraternity and forgiveness. His Companions



and his wives saw him pray for hours during the night, away from the others, alone with the whispered prayers and invocations that nurtured his dialogue with the One. Aishah, his wife, was impressed and surprised: "Don't you take on too much [worship] while God has already forgiven all your past and future sins?" The Prophet answered: "How could I but be a thankful servant?" He did not demand of his Companions the worship, fasting, and meditations that he exacted of himself. (pg 111)



To Be Religiously Resilient Through A Loving Relationship with Others

In order to tighten the bonds between Muslims, and in particular between those Muslims who were from Medina (the Ansar) and those who had emigrated from Mecca (the Muhajirun), the Prophet decided to set up a formal pact of brotherhood (*al-muakhah*) between the Muslims. This meant that each Muhajir was bound by a pact to an Ansar, who was to help him settle down, share his belongings with him, and enable him to live in Medina in the best possible circumstances.

This pact was to provide the new Muslim community settled in Medina with particular strength and unity. Extremely deep relationships were created between believers who were later to attest to the intensity of their mutual love in God.

Those bonds constituted the Muslim community's spiritual and social strength, and in this lay the secret of their success before God and among men: faith in God, love for parents, fraternity among people, and ethics at the service of the universe and of all beings. (pgs 92-93)



When the Prophet was at home or in public and his daughter came to him or entered the room, he would stand up and greet her, publicly showing her great respect and tenderness. Both the people of Medina and the Meccans were surprised at this behavior toward a daughter, who in their respective customs did not usually receive such treatment. The Prophet would kiss his daughter, talk to her, confide in her, and have her sit by his side, without paying attention to the remarks or even the criticisms that his behavior could give rise to.

One of them, al-Aqra ibn Habis, expressed his shock and said: "I have ten children and I have never kissed any one of them!" The Prophet answered: "He who is not generous [loving, benevolent], God is not generous [loving, benevolent] to him." (pg 118)



The Messenger (*peace be upon him*) loved children, with their innocence, gentleness, and ability to be present in the moment. Close to God, close to his own heart, he remained attentive to those who primarily understood the heart's language. He kissed them, carried them on his shoulders, and played with them, reaching toward their innocence, which is in its essence the expression of a permanent prayer to God.

The Messenger, moreover, drew from children his sense of play and innocence; from them he learned to look at people and the world around him with wonder. From watching children experience beauty he also more fully developed his sense of aesthetics: in front of beauty, he wept, he was moved, he sometimes sobbed, and he was often filled with well-being by the poetic musicality of a phrase or by the spiritual call of a verse offered by the Most Generous, the Infinitely Beautiful. (pg 213-214)



To Be Inclusive

The Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) came to humankind with a message of faith, ethics, and hope, in which the One reminds all people of His presence, His requirements, and the final Day of Return and Encounter. Though the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) came with this message, throughout his life he kept listening to women, children, men, slaves, rich, and poor, as well as outcasts. He listened to, welcomed, and comforted them. (pg 214)



The Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) had always retained very strong ties with the members of different clans and with this kin who had not accepted Islam.

It was a similar attitude of trust that had made it possible for Muslim to emigrate to Abyssinia, under protection of a king whom the Prophet trusted



even though he was not a Muslim. This attitude is to be found throughout the Prophet's life: he established his relationships in the name of trust and the respect of principles, and not exclusively on the basis of similar religious affiliation. His Companions had understood this as well, and they did not hesitate to develop solid ties with non-Muslims in the name of kinship or friendship, on the basis of mutual respect and trust, even in perilous situations. (pgs. 76-77)



The Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) kept distinguishing between situations and the people involved in them, and he showed the utmost respect toward individuals and their beliefs. For many years, a young Jew was his companion and followed him everywhere, for he loved the Prophet's company. The Prophet never asked him to abandon his faith. Eventually the boy fell seriously ill, and on his deathbed he asked his father to allow him to embrace Islam, but during all his time by the Prophet's side he had remained what he was and enjoyed the Prophet's love and regard. (pg 90)



To Be Contributive

A number of new converts to Islam who had no home and often nothing to eat had settled around the mosque, near the Prophet's dwelling.

The Prophet was most concerned by their situation and showed them continuous solidarity. He would listen to them, answer their questions, and look after their needs.

The faithful felt that he saw, respected, understood, and loved them. Indeed, he did love them, and he told them so. Moreover, he advised them to remember to tell one another of their mutual love: "When someone loves their brother [or sister] let them tell them that they love them." He once took young Muadh ibn Jabal by the hand and whispered: "O Muadh, by God, I love you. And I advise you, O Muadh, never to forget to say, after each ritual prayer: "O God, help me remember You, thank You, and perfect my worship of You." (pg 114)



The Prophet granted his forgiveness to all the women and men who came to him or to a Companion. Wahshi ibn Harb, who had killed Hamzah, was also forgiven.

When Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl came to the Prophet, the latter warned his Companions: "Ikrimah, Abu Jahl's son, is coming to you as a believer. Do not insult his father, for insulting the dead hurts the living without reaching the dead." He thus reminded them not only to forgive but also to always remember that nobody can be held responsible for someone else's mistakes, not even their father's. (pg 178)



The Prophet himself was a model of equity toward those who did not share his faith. Through all the years of his mission, he had continued to receive important deposits from non-Muslims traders who went on dealing with him and wholly trusted him.

On the eve of his departure for Medina, the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) asked Ali to give back one by one to their respective owners the deposits he still held; he scrupulously applied the principles of honesty and justice that Islam had taught him, whomever he dealt with, be they Muslims or non-Muslims. (pg 77)



To Be Adaptive

The Prophet's first words on arriving at Quba informed the Muslims of their basic responsibilities: "Spread peace [salam], feed the hungry, honor kinship ties, pray while people sleep, you shall enter paradise in peace [bisalam]." The two references to peace, at the beginning and at the end of his address, point to how the Prophet wished his Companions to understand their settlement in their new city. Caring for the poor and honoring kinship ties appear as reminders of the ethical basis of the Muslim presence, which each believer must pledge to permanently respect. (pgs. 87-88)



To Be Progressive

Absolutely everything in his life was an instrument of renewal and transformation, from the slightest detail to the greatest events. (pg 214)



Throughout his mission the Prophet sought his Companions' advice, encouraging them to express their opinions and paying them careful attention. He would often ask questions on various subjects and give the answers only after his Companions had thought by themselves and expressed different conjectures.

For example, he once said: "A strong man is not a man who overcomes his enemy!" The Companions mulled this over among themselves, then asked him: "Then who is a strong man?" The Prophet surprised his audience and led them to a deeper understanding of the question with his answer: "A strong man is a man who controls himself when he is angry!" (pg 102)



Both by asking questions and by formulating paradoxical or seemingly contradictory statements, the Prophet stimulated his Companions' critical sense and their ability to go beyond mere blind obedience or mechanical, mind-destroying imitation. This method developed the intellectual capacities necessary for consultations to be effective. (pg 103)



He had listened to women in his society, who often experienced denial of their rights, exclusion, and ill-treatment. Revelation recalls this listening and this accessibility: "God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and carries her complaint to God. And God hears the argument between both of you. For God hears and sees [all things]." Similarly, he listened to a woman who wanted to divorce her husband because she did not like him anymore; he heard her, looked into the matter, and separated them. He also received another woman who complained that her father had married her off without asking for her opinion; he was ready to separate her and husband, but she informed him that she was actually satisfied with her father's choice but wanted to make it known "to fathers" that "this was not their decision" and that they could not act in such a way without seeking their daughter's consent. (pg 213)



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