



# PROPHET MUHAMMAD <sup>(S.A.W)</sup> AS THE PROPHET OF MERCY: A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF HIS BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS CHILDREN

Mohmad Ilham Shiekh<sup>1</sup>, Waseem Yousuf Khan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Research Scholar, Centre for Shaikh-ul Aalam Studies (CSAS),  
Markaz-i Noor, University of Kashmir, Srinagar (India)

<sup>2</sup> M.Phil Research Scholar, Shah-i-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies,  
University of Kashmir, Srinagar (India)

## ABSTRACT

Addressing Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup>, Allah <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> says in the Qur'an, "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds." (21:107). Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> is indeed an embodiment of Divine Mercy. He is a blessing for the whole of mankind, as his message was not confined to a particular era or to a particular people. His teachings can be regarded as a mercy for his followers, his opponents, for men, women and children too. According to the Qur'an, progeny is a gift from Allah <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> to His faithful servants; it is one of the bounties bestowed upon them by Allah <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>. Children are special people. They have their own identity. Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> showed this through his behaviour. He loved children and was always compassionate and merciful towards them. He showed his affection for them in many ways. He hugged them and patted them on the back. He touched their heads, combing their hair with his fingers. He liked to hold little children in his arms. He made funny faces (like pulling his tongue out) to please them. When lying down he seated them on his legs or chest. In short, Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> loved to play with children. He used to kiss children and loved them very much. In this paper, I have tried to highlight the treatment of Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> which showed his extreme kindness to children.

**Keywords:** Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup>, Children, Mercy, kindness, love.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Prophet Muhammad's <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> life is the best and perfect model for the entire humanity as Allah <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> says in the Holy Qur'an:

{لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ}



**Assuredly there has been an excellent pattern, for you in the Messenger of Allah (as combining in himself all types of virtues).<sup>1</sup>**

Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> establish justice, love, equality, humanity and dignity in all those around him. The most distinctive quality of our beloved Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> was that he was a blessing to all of Allah's creatures.

Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> once said:

*"Those who are merciful will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you".<sup>2</sup>*

Once companions <sup>(r.a)</sup> asked what actions are most excellent. Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> replied:

*"One from whose tongue and hands the other Muslims are secure".<sup>3</sup>*

Whoever wants to strengthen the bond of slavery (or servitude) with the Lord and wants to win His pleasure and Paradise has to follow the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup>; whoever wishes to make himself worthy of love of Allah <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> has to follow the Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup>; whoever wants to achieve the success of this world and Hereafter has no option but to follow the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup>. The most distinctive quality of our beloved Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> was that he was a blessing to all mankind, he was blessings to all of Allah's creatures, he was blessing to all of Allah's universes. Allah introduced the Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> in these words:

{ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ }

**"And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds."<sup>4</sup>**

Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> is indeed an embodiment of Divine Mercy. He is a blessing for the whole of mankind, as his message was not confined to a particular era or to a particular people. His teachings can be regarded as a mercy for his followers, his opponents, for men, women and children too. Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> treated every human being with respect, kindness and dignity and also taught the same lesson to his companions. Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> loved children and was always compassionate and merciful towards them. He showed his affection for them in many ways. He hugged them and patted them on the back. He touched their heads, combing their hair with his fingers. He liked to hold little children in his arms. He made funny faces (like pulling his tongue out) to please them. When lying down he seated them on his legs or chest. In short, Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> loved to play with children. He used to kiss children and loved them very much.

## **II. DEALING THE CHILDREN WITH KINDNESS AND MERCY**

Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> showed all of the humanity how to deal with the children with kindness and mercy. There are numerous traditions that highlight this very beautiful nature. In one of the Hadith, a companion among the believing women called Umm Khalid <sup>(r.a)</sup> narrates an incident happened to her during her childhood she still remembers, where she says:

"I came to the Messenger of Allah <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> with my father and I had a yellow dress on me. The Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> said "Sanah, Sanah"<sup>5</sup>, she said "then I went to play with the ring of the Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> whereupon



my father stopped me” then the Messenger of Allah <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> said “*leave her*” then he said to me “*Wear out and consume, wear out and consume, wear out and consume (he was supplicating for her to wear more clothes and consume)*”. ”<sup>6</sup>

A very distinctive and expressing scene of what we need to say. The man comes along with his daughter to the Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> knowing that he loves children, also not feeling fed up or bored from meeting them, he smiles to them and be happy to receive them. Even more, the little girl bravely jumps on his back and play while he is laughing without boredom; he even supplicated for her and repeated his supplication three times for her. This is the best example of his mercy upon children.

In another incident, Hadhrat Abu Musa Al-Ash’ari <sup>(r.a)</sup> says:

*“I was blessed with a boy, so I came with him to the Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> where he named him Ibrahim, he did Tahnik for him with a softened date and asked Allah to bless him and returned him to me.”* <sup>7</sup>

Another incident indicates that how much patient and compassionate was Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> with the children in treating with them. Hadhrat Abu Qatadah <sup>(r.a)</sup> said:

*“The Prophet came out towards us, while carrying Umamah, the daughter of Abi Al-‘As (his grand daughter) over his shoulder. He prayed, and when he wanted to bow, he put her down, and when he stood up, he lifted her up.”* <sup>8</sup>

Another example of his mercy upon children reflects in this Hadith, when Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> hears a child crying while he’s praying he would lighten his prayer so the mother could finish prayer and carry him, see what he needs so he would stop crying. Narrated ‘Abdullah bin Abi Qatadah al-Ansari <sup>(r.a)</sup>: My father said, Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> said:

*“Whenever I stand for prayer, I want to prolong it but on hearing the cries of a child, I would shorten it as I dislike to put its mother in trouble.”* <sup>9</sup>

### III. HONOURING AND RESPECTING THE CHILDREN

Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> gave respect and honour to the children. He does not neglect them but gave a proper care and mould them accordingly better to grow up disciplined. When Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> sees a child that needs to be disciplined then he will deal with them tenderly and kindly without shouting at them or scolding them. Hadhrat Umar Ibn Abi Salamah <sup>(r.a)</sup> said: “I was a little boy sitting on the Prophet’s <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> lap and my hand is all over the plate, then the Messenger of Allah <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> said to me:

*“O boy, say ‘Bismillah’ (In the name of Allah), eat with your right hand and eat from what’s in front of you.”* <sup>10</sup>

The battle orders of Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> given to the *mujahidin* of Islam at the time of *Jihad* carry a good explanation of the injunction of respecting the women and children as well. In a hadith from al-Bukhari and Muslim, as narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar <sup>(r.a)</sup>, it is said:

*“The Holy Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> has prohibited the killing of women and children.”* <sup>11</sup>



#### IV. EXPRESSING THE LOVE WHEN TREATING WITH THE CHILDREN

Prophet Muhammad never held back his love for the children and always expressed his fondness to them. He would pick up children in his arms, play with them, and kiss them. He played with them and took such keen interest in them. Some people who were not able to understand the power of expressing love to children wondered why the Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> played with children and took such an interest in them. A Hadith narrated by Hadhrat Abu Hurairah <sup>(r.a)</sup> said that:

Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> kissed Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali while Al-Aqra' ibn Habis At-Tamim was sitting with him. Al-Aqra' said, "I have ten children and have never kissed one of them." The Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> cast a look at him and said, *"Whoever is not merciful to others will not be treated mercifully."*<sup>12</sup>

According to another version, He <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> said:

*"I cannot put mercy in your heart after Allah has taken it away from it".*<sup>13</sup>

The Prophet's <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> love for children was not restricted to his children and grandchildren. The scope of his mercy and affection embraced all children, and he showed the same interest and gentleness to his Companion's children as well. The following hadith narrated by Hadhrat Usamah ibn Zaid <sup>(r.a)</sup> shows this humane aspect of the Prophet's <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> personality. He <sup>(r.a)</sup> said:

Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> used to put me on (one of) his thighs and put Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali on his other thigh, and then embrace us and say, *"O Allah! Please be merciful to them, as I am merciful to them."*<sup>14</sup>

In another Hadith, we see the Prophet's <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> tolerance towards children. It is narrated that

*Umm Qais bint Maihsin <sup>(r.a)</sup> once visited the Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup>, bringing along with her one of her sons, who had not yet began to eat solid food. After the Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> took a child in his lap and then the child urinated on him, thus spoiling a part of the Prophet's <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> garment. Rather than becoming angry or upset, the Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> asked for water and poured it over the place of the urine and did not wash it.*<sup>15</sup>

Children were never too intimidated to approach him, because he took an interest in them and dealt with them at their intellectual level.

#### V. LOVE AND AFFECTION OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD <sup>(S.A.W)</sup> WITH CHILDREN

Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> was particularly compassionate towards children. When he saw a child crying, he sat beside him or her and shared his or her feelings. He felt the pain of a mother for her child more than the mother herself. He would take children in his arms and embrace them.

Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> always loved to greet the children, showed them affection and joking with them. Once he <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> saw a group of children who were racing. He joined them and raced with them. He used to give a ride to



children on his camel on returning from journey. Hadhrat Anas ibn Malik <sup>(r.a)</sup> said that I never saw anyone who was more compassionate towards children than Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup>. Whenever Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> met children of his companions he used to take the children in his arms kissed them and patted them.

All parents love their children naturally but sometimes this varies depending upon whether the child is a boy or a girl. It was a common custom in Arab culture to celebrate birth of a boy. But, however when a daughter was born it was viewed as a sad day. Even girls were buried alive. But Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> totally changed this attitude and raised the status of women. Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> called her a blessed woman who's first child is a daughter. A Hadith narrated by Hadhrat 'Aisha <sup>(r.a)</sup>:

*"A lady along with her two daughters came to me asking me (for some alms), but she found nothing with me except one date which I gave to her and she divided it between her two daughters, and then she got up and went away. Then the Prophet came in and I informed him about this story. He said, "Whoever is in charge of (put to test by) these daughters and treats them generously, then they will act as a shield for him from the (Hell) Fire."."*<sup>16</sup>

Another saying of the Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> proves that Muslims should be conscious to treat their sons and daughters justly. He <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> says:

*"Fear Allah and treat your children [small or grown] fairly (with equal justice)"*.<sup>17</sup>

New-born children in the community were brought to Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> and he cuddled them, named them and supplicated for them.

Interacting at the child's intellectual level The Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> interacted with children at their own level of intelligence and was not above making jokes with them. The son of Umm Sulaym <sup>(r.a)</sup> had a pet nightingale that he was very fond of. The Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> would ask him:

*"O Abu 'Umair! Where is the Nughayr (nightingale)?"*<sup>18</sup>

The word Nughayr, which means a small bird, rhymed with the child's name, Abu 'Umair. The Prophet <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> used this rhyming play on words in order to cheer up Abu 'Umair <sup>(r.a)</sup>, who was sad because the small bird he would play with had just died.<sup>19</sup>

From all the above Hadith, we see Prophet Muhammad's <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> attitude toward children is an example for the whole human race that shows how to treat them and cherish them at all times.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Islam views childhood with hope and inspiration, as something to look forward to, that is sought after and that is longed for. When the long-awaited hope is achieved, the fruit reaped is happiness of the soul, delight of the heart and elation of the chest. According to the Qur'anic text, progeny is a gift from the Allah <sup>(s.w.t)</sup> to His faithful servants; it is one of the bounties bestowed upon them by the Almighty Giver of Bounties. It is also a fulfilment of the hope that is longed for by sincere believing servants of Allah <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>. Children are special people. They have their own identity. Our beloved Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> showed this through his behaviour. He



treated children differently. He was definitely kind in his dealings with them. He loved children and was always compassionate and merciful towards them. He showed his affection and mercy for them in many ways. He treated children with dignity and even with the respect that is afforded to adults. The Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> was always pleased to see parents loving and caressing their children. The love and compassion of Prophet Muhammad <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> for all kinds of creatures was not of the kind claimed by today's 'humanists'. He was sincere and balanced in his love and compassion. He was more compassionate than any other person. He was a Prophet raised by Allah <sup>(s.w.t)</sup>, for the guidance and happiness of conscious beings mankind and jinn and the harmony of existence. Therefore, he lived not for himself but for others; he is a mercy for all the worlds. He <sup>(s.a.w)</sup> has provided for us clear guidelines through his own childhood and through his treatment with children that the concept of mercy is never complete without showing affection towards children.

## End Notes and References

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[1] *Al-Qur'an*, 33:21

[2] Muhammad bin Isa Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 1924

[3] Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol.1, Hadith No. 9.

[4] *Al-Qur'an*, 21:107

[5] *Sanah* means nice in Ethiopian language

[6] Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 4, Hadith No. 305.

[7] *ibid.*, Vol. 7, Hadith No. 376.

[8] *ibid.*, Vol. 8, Hadith No. 25.

[9] *ibid.*, Vol. 1, Hadith No. 827.

[10] *ibid.*, Vol. 7, Hadith No. 290-291.

[11] Maulana Mufti Muhammad Shafi, *Maariful -Quran*, Eng. Tr. Prof. Muhammad Hasan Askari and Prof. Muhammad Shamim, Vol. 1, p. 483.

[12] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 8, Hadith No. 26.

[13] *ibid.*, Vol. 8, Hadith No. 27.

[14] *ibid.*, Vol. 8, Hadith No. 32.

[15] *ibid.*, Vol. 1, Hadith No. 223.

[16] *ibid.*, Vol. 8, Hadith No. 24.

[17] Abul Husain Muslim al-Nisapuri, *Sahih Al-Muslim*, Book 12, Hadith No. 3965.

[18] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 8, Hadith No. 222.

[19] *Fath-ul Bari*, Ibn hajar Asqalaani, Volume 10, Hadith No. 583.