

Love for the Prophet is a Condition of Faith by Dr. Ahmad Shafaat (written in 1986)

Love for the Prophet Muhammad is a measure of one's ***iman*** (faith and inner conviction) and our ***iman*** is completed and perfected only when our love for the Prophet exceeds our love for everything else in this world, including our own lives. The Holy Qur'an says:

"The Prophet is preferable for the believers even to their own selves..." (33:6)

This is a [definitional sentence](#) which tells us what it takes to be a believer: preferring the Prophet even to one's own life. In confirmation of this the Prophet is reported in Hadith to have said:

"None of you becomes a believer until I am dearer to him than his children, his parents and all mankind." (as reported by Bukhari and Muslim) Some versions add: "his life, his wealth and his family".

The best of believers, the ***suhaba*** (companions of the Prophet), did show such love for the Prophet, especially the noblest of them. Hadhrat Ali, speaking on behalf of all the community of ***suhaba*** in Medina, is reported to have said:

"The Holy Prophet is dearer to us than our wealth, our children, our fathers, our forefathers, our mothers and cool water at the time of severe thirst."

The firmly established principle in Islam that our ***iman*** is as good as our love for the Prophet is fairly and accurately expressed by an Urdu poet when he says:

Without love for the Prophet it is difficult to find God;
He who is not of the Prophet's cannot be of God.
Without love for Muhammad faith cannot be complete;
To be a Muslim it is not enough to believe in God.
Daily prayers, charity, fasting and hajj are fine;
But despite these I cannot be among the faithful.
Unless I am ready to be sacrificed for the honour of Muhammad;
God is witness - my faith cannot attain perfection."

Love of the Prophet breathes life into our practice of religion. Without it our religion reduces to an empty adherence to a set of dead rules and rituals.

("Soul of ***iman***, essence of the Qur'an and life of religion - all these are love of Muhammad, the Mercy to All Creation.")

THE MEANING OF THIS LOVE FOR THE PROPHET

At one level it seems clear why the faithful should love the Prophet: he is their teacher, guide and leader and it is impossible for him to teach, guide and lead them if they don't love him. But there is a deeper meaning in the principle that love for the Prophet is essential for ***iman***.

Love of the Prophet is love of all the beauty and nobility of character, truthfulness, justness, humility and inner strength of which man is capable and which the Prophet as [al-insan al-kamil](#) (the Perfect man) possessed in the utmost degree. Love for the Prophet means to acknowledge, cherish and glorify all the potential of goodness and greatness that God has created within Man.

It also means love of humanity, not just in regard to its potential for perfection but also despite its general inability to realize that potential and despite all kind of imperfections and weaknesses from which it suffers. For the Prophet is not only the Perfect Man but also the Representative Man who on the day of judgment will represent mankind and [plead on their behalf for their imperfections and weaknesses before the throne of God](#).

Thus love of the Prophet, on the one hand puts us on the road to perfection by making us cherish it dearly and on the other hand it helps us accept our imperfect humanity and in this way to live in peace with ourselves as repentant servants of God hopeful of His mercy. This is why love for the Prophet is a condition of ***iman***, for what is ***iman*** if it is not to acknowledge and repent for one's imperfections and weaknesses and to cherish and strive for - even as an unachievable ideal - the perfection of which man is potentially capable?

There are two closely interconnected sides of ***iman***. One is divine and consists of recognizing God and being at peace with Him. The other is recognizing one's own self and being at peace with oneself. The two sides are like two sides of a coin, none of which can exist without the other. This is shown by numerous verses in the Qur'an and ahadith of the Prophet. For example, the Prophet is reported to have said that he who recognized his own self recognized his Lord. Approaching the same principle from the other direction, the Qur'an says:

"that those who forget God are made to forget their own selves" (59:19).

The word Islam means being at peace with God and this is linked in the Qur'an with being a self at peace with itself.

The love of the Prophet represents the human side of faith. as man the Prophet represents a believers own true self. His love for the Prophet means that he has recognized his own true self and is at peace with himself which in turn means that he has recognized his Lord and made peace with Him by surrendering to Him.

THE PROPHET ALSO LOVED US

If the faithful love the prophet, they are not the first to do so. The Prophet loved the faithful first. The Qur'an testifies to this when it says:

"(The Prophet) is greatly grieved at your loss and extremely anxious for your good. For the believers he is full of kindness and rahmah (mercy, love)." (9:128)

The Prophet's love was not limited just to the believers. In a way he loved all of God's creation. God says in the Qur'an:

"We have not sent you (O Prophet) but as rahmah to all the worlds." (21:107)

It is true that the Prophet had to battle those who were bent on doing ***zulm*** (injustice) on their own selves and to remind them of the bitter reality of hell. But this too was out of ***rahmah*** (mercy and love), not out of enmity or hate. It is always an easy thing to do to leave alone those of one's fellow human beings who choose the path that leads to their destruction. In contrast, [it takes a tremendous amount of love and courage to try to help them, which is exactly what the Prophet tried to do, successfully as it turned out towards the end of his life](#). That the Prophet was motivated by ***rahmah*** even for his opponents is shown by the ease with which he forgave them all at the time of Makkah conquest.

HOW THE PROPHET SUFFERED FOR MANKIND

Among the indications of the Prophet's love for mankind is the untold sufferings he endured at the hands of his opponents whom he forgave with such ease after his victory.

When the Holy Prophet started his work almost all the people of his city opposed him even though they had known him for all of his life as a man of exceptional integrity and intelligence. They at first subjected him to verbal attacks, jeers and insults. But later they started to combine verbal attacks with physical aggression. They would lay thorns in his way and throw garbage and dust on him. On one occasion he returned with dust still on his head. One of his daughters rose, with tears in her eyes, to wipe it off. The Prophet was more hurt to see tears in his daughter's eyes than the treatment he himself received from his fellow citizens. He comforted her, saying: ["My daughter, weep not, for verily the Lord will be your father's helper."](#)

Once the city populace tried to inflict a different type on injury on the Prophet. When one day he went out for an errand, not one of the people in the streets looked at him or spoke to him or jeered or insulted him. This, their silent way of saying to the Prophet, "You are not one of us because you speak against our traditional ways" hurt the Prophet more than the jeers and insults he was used to hearing before.

When the Prophet felt that he was not getting anywhere with the Makkans, he started to turn more and more to outsiders who came to Makkah for pilgrimage. But his efforts among the pilgrims were frustrated by men like Abu Lahab who would follow the Prophet and cry aloud: "Believe him not, he is a lying renegade". One day this especially grieved the Prophet. But all he did was to look upward and say, "O Lord if You will it would not be thus!".

In the year 620 C.E., the Prophet decided to travel outside Makkah, so that he could preach his message without being followed by his Makkah enemies. The city of Al-Tayf was the natural first choice. Situated about sixty miles east of Makkah, it was the nearest city of importance. Accompanied only by Zayd, the Prophet made a tiring journey through barren rocky defiles. He spent ten days in Al-Tayf preaching to the tribal chiefs as well as common people. But they all rejected him saying they did not want to spoil relations with the Makkans for the sake of a new religion. As the days passed, the people of Al-Tayf became more and more hostile, until the tenth day they began to hoot him through the streets and pelt him with stones. Even as he fled the city, a relentless mob pursued him and did not desist until they had chased him two or three miles across the sandy plain to the foot of the surrounding hills. There, tired and with blood flowing from both his legs, the Prophet took refuge in one of the orchards. Zayd who had endeavored to shield the Prophet against the stones thrown at him was wounded in the head.

After a couple of years the Prophet managed to get sufficient support in one Arabian city - Medina - and decided to move there. But his enemies in Makkah plotted to murder him before he could emigrate to Medina, a plot that came very close to being successful.

Even after his escape from hostile Makkah to the relatively friendly Medina the suffering of the Prophet continued. The Quraysh and other Arab tribes under their influence frequently waged battles against him and his followers. In Medina itself the Jews vexed and frustrated the Prophet with their wily plots and at one time even tried to poison him. The hypocrites, the secret enemies of the Prophet who pretended to be Muslims, were also busy in intrigues and whisper campaigns against the Prophet, a particularly nasty example of which is provided by their accusations against the Prophet's wife Ayesha which were as painful for the Prophet as for Ayesha herself. Sometimes even the believers unintentionally caused pain to the Prophet. They would, for example, sometimes impolitely walk away from him leaving him alone standing by himself, as is witnessed by the following verse in the Qur'an:

"When they see some (opportunity of) trade or some amusement they rush headlong towards it and leave you standing alone..." (62:11)

These and many other things did the Holy Prophet suffer over a period of many years. He did not have to. Just before he started his mission he had everything that men generally hope for: health, a prosperous business, a loving wife, fine children, faithful relatives and friends as well as the trust and respect of his fellow citizens. If he wanted he could have led as comfortable a life as any in Makkah. But he chose the road of suffering and hardship. He did so for the love of the very people who ignorantly persecuted him and for the welfare of the whole of mankind.

THE MEANING OF THE PROPHET'S SUFFERING

Like all aspects of the Prophet's life, his suffering has profound lessons for us. It teaches us that this world is a battlefield between good and evil, truth and falsehood, justice and oppression and that although God has willed that in the long run goodness, truth and justice will always be victorious. He has also willed that this victory will not be made too easy.

The suffering of the Prophet is also a vivid reminder for us that whereas man has tremendous potential for goodness he also has an enormous potential for evil. The Prophet represents the ultimate in human potential for goodness while the opposition that his work inspired in his countrymen and which he gradually conquered by his love and wisdom represents the ultimate in human potential for evil. But we must not condemn those who persecuted the Prophet. For the Prophet's suffering was caused by that potential for ignorance and obstinacy that is found in all of us. Who knows that some of us would not have thrown garbage on the Prophet or persecuted him in some other way if we had been living in Makkah of his time? After all, men far greater than us, e.g. Hadhrat 'Umar and Hadhrat Khalid bin Walid at one time persecuted the Prophet. No, the Prophet did not suffer in order that we may condemn anyone. He suffered so that we may have hope and humility. He suffered so that we may find out how much potential there is within us for goodness and how much potential there is within us for ignorance and obstinacy - the root causes of all evil. We need to see both potentials within us. The first one gives us hope in our destiny and in the destiny of man generally and the second one gives us humility. And humility and hope is what we need in order to prosper.

Thus the Prophet's suffering should make us think of the potential of evil that we all have within us and make us determined to overcome that evil. The best way to overcome evil is to love the Prophet, for the more we love the Prophet the more we will strengthen the element of goodness in us and the more capable we will become to overcome evil.

GLORIFYING AND BLESSING THE PROPHET

Our love for the Prophet can be expressed by glorifying and blessing him. A verse in the Holy Qur'an mentions the three aspects under the single term [salat `ala an-nabi](#).

The Arabic phrase [salat `ala](#) has three meanings:

- 1) Turning to someone with love and affection.
- 2) Glorifying or praising someone.
- 3) Blessing or favoring someone.

In the above verse all three meanings can be applied so that the verse can be translated as follows:

"Undoubtedly, God and His angels love, glorify and bless the Prophet. O believers! You (too) love, glorify and bless the Prophet and salute him with all due respect." (33:56)

How do God and His angels love, glorify and bless the Prophet and how can we do the same?

The least way in which God loves the Prophet is that He makes His beloved anyone who follows him, as it is said in the Qur'an:

"Say (to mankind O Muhammad), If you love God, follow me (and) God will love you..." (3:31)

God alone knows how else he loves the Prophet.

The way God glorifies the Prophet is that He has given him the name Ahmad or Muhammad, which means the Glorious, the Admirable, that He has been giving it to mankind the good news of his coming through earlier prophets (3:81, 7:157, 61:6) and that He raises his mention among those on earth and those in heaven, as He says: **"We have raised your mention" (94:4)**

God blesses the Prophet by continually raising his station. The least of God's blessing on the Prophet is that He has made him the leader and representative of all mankind.

Angels love the Prophet as the completely faithful servants of a king would love those whom the king loves. They glorify the Prophet by singing his praises in heaven and they bless him by asking God to bless him more and more.

The least of the ways the believers can love the Prophet is to love him the way all people love their leaders. The best way they can love him is by being willing to sacrifice all that they have for his name's sake.

The way the believers can glorify the Prophet is to praise him through poetic and prose expressions, in writings and in speeches, on radio and on television [and now on the Internet], in the gatherings of Muslims and in the gatherings of non-Muslims.

The way the believers can bless the Prophet is by reciting one of the several forms of ***durud*** that are traditional and that pray to God to keep blessing the Prophet more and more.

(Some ***fugaha*** (Muslim jurists) say that the verse under consideration puts an obligation on the Muslims which is dispensed with if one recites a ***durud*** at least once in his lifetime. Others say that it obliges Muslims to recite ***durud*** each time the name of the Prophet is mentioned. But such dry legalistic interpretations do not do justice to the spirit of the verse. If faith requires preferring the Prophet over our own lives and loving him more than our children, parents and all mankind, then what is the value of uttering now and then a ritual formula as an obligation?)

[Salutations](#). The verse also tells the believer to salute the Prophet with all due respect. We can salute the Prophet by reciting ***durud***, since all forms of ***durud*** contain salutations. This, however, is the least of the ways of saluting the Prophet. The best of the ways is to wholeheartedly accept him as our leader, teacher and guide and to obey him in the spirit.

HOW FAR CAN WE GO IN GLORIFYING THE PROPHET

All praises are fit for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) if they do not raise him beyond the level of a man and a creature of God. We can, for example, declare him to be the greatest of all the prophets and messengers of God and the crown of all creation. That this praise is applicable to the Prophet is shown by the way the Holy Qur'an presents him as a messenger and mercy of God to all mankind and for all times to come, in contrast to other prophets and messengers whose missions were limited to particular periods and regions. It is also clear from the Islamic belief that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) completed and perfected the work of earlier prophets who brought partial revelations. Hadith also supports the position that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the greatest of all Prophets (and therefore the crown of all creation, since man is God's best creation and the prophets are the best of men, so that the best of the prophets is the best of God's creation). Thus in almost all books of hadith we find the tradition that when during ***mi'raj*** the Prophet was taken from the mosque in Makkah to the mosque in Jerusalem he met all the earlier prophets and led them in prayer as their imam. Also, in Sahih Muslim, one chapter in entitled: "The Superiority of the Prophet over all creation" and contains the following hadith:

Abu Hurayra reported the Prophet as saying: "I will be the leader of all the children of Adam on the day of judgment. My grave will be the first to open. I will be the first to intercede and my intercession will be accepted first."

Some Muslims hesitate to declare the Prophet as the greatest of all the Prophets because the Qur'an says:

"(The believers) make no distinction between any of His messengers." (2:285)

But the Holy Qur'an also says:

"Some of these messengers have We favoured more than others..." (2:253)

If we do not concentrate on the first verse in disregard of the other, then it becomes clear that the Holy Qur'an is making a distinction between the nature of the prophets and their stature. The first verse is telling us that in nature there is no distinction between the various prophets: they were all sent by the same true God, they were all serving one and the same plan of God and they were all human beings and part of a single brotherhood of righteous servants of God. The second verse is telling us that in stature or rank some prophets were superior to others.

Let the Muslims therefore have not the slightest hesitation in declaring the Prophet Muhammad to be the greatest of all prophets and thus the noblest of men and the crown and pride of the whole of God's creation.

Some Muslims try to dampen love and admiration for the Prophet in other Muslims and in themselves on two other grounds. First, they fear that "too much" expression of love and admiration for the Prophet can lead to his deification and therefore to shirk. Second, they fear that expressing love and admiration for the Prophet somehow means ignoring his message and commandments of God.

The second fear is without any basis. For one thing expressing love and admiration for the Prophet is itself a commandment of God, as God says:

"Love, glorify and bless him and salute him with all due respect."

For another, love and admiration for the Prophet and their expression cannot by themselves lead to disobedience. Indeed, as we have seen earlier, they are necessary for ***iman***, which in turn is necessary for true obedience.

The first fear does have some basis. In fact, the Prophet himself cautioned us against following the footsteps of the adherents of other religions who exaggerated in praise of their prophets, raising them to the level of God and thus falling into shirk, the most deadly sin of all. But it would be a mistake to fight shirk by putting cold water on the fire of our love and admiration for the Prophet. For that would be like destroying shirk by destroying ***iman***, which is clearly a very unwise strategy.

On ***id milad an-nabi*** (birthdate of the Prophet) and other occasions let us therefore wholeheartedly and generously and without any ***bukhl*** (misery, what miser people do) express all the love and admiration for the Prophet that can be expressed for someone other than God.