

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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The Imitation of
Muhammad

by

Zahurul Hasan Sharib

Preface

This book deals – as suggested by its title – with the imitation of Muhammad (Allāh’s blessing and peace be with him). After writing *The 99 most beautiful names of Allāh*, I felt an urge and a keen desire to write a similar book on the names of the holy Prophet, which are also ninety-nine in number. When I mentioned what I had in my mind to Muhammad Sirāj and Gulnār, they appeared to be overwhelmed with joy.

I started the work on the book with unflagging zeal, dogged determination and with dedicated devotion. It was a spiritual joy for me, indeed, to work on the book day in and day out, in spite of the weather, disturbances and distractions. I am happy that through the grace of Allāh and through the kindness of the holy Prophet, I have been able to complete the book.

I have given every name in Arabic and English. The meaning of every name is given in English. I have explained the implications of every name. I have also described briefly as to how you can emulate the name, how one can act upon it, and to what extent and in what manner one can be benefitted by the name. Any name meditated upon as a spiritual practice is sure to give rich dividends.

I treat the book as a mark of favour of the holy Prophet, for I believe and believe rightly that the holy Prophet himself has assigned me this noble and inspiring work and he himself gave me the vitality, strength and power of endurance to write it and eventually to

complete it. I pray with due deference and in all humility, that the holy Prophet be pleased enough as to approve and accept my humble token of respect and devotion. The pleasure of the holy Prophet constitutes the best reward of my labour.

I hope and trust, that the people, particularly the people in the West, will be benefitted by the ninety-nine names, which cast a halo on the person and personality of the holy Prophet.

I implore, invoke and pray that the holy Prophet may be pleased to suitably reward Muhammad Sirāj, who has typed the book, taking it as a humble service to the holy Prophet.

Zahūrul Hassan Shārib

Introduction

The idea to write this book came about in London. We were sitting on a bench in a park, while being in the company of Hazrat Zahūrul Hassan Shārib. He made it clear to us that he had just completed working on a book¹ called *The 99 most beautiful names of Allāh*. ‘Would it not be a good idea,’ he asked, ‘to write a similar book about the qualities of the Prophet Muhammad (Allāh’s blessing and peace be with him)?’

He explained that he wanted to write a book dealing with the names (i.e. qualities or functions) of the Prophet. He intended to give a translation of each ‘name’² as well as a short commentary on its meaning, to be followed by a description of the inner attitude which is necessary to emulate this quality of the Prophet. He wanted to finish, if possible, with an appropriate verse of the Qur’ān.

When we asked him what the intention was of such a book, he gave an extensive answer. Firstly, he said, the *imitatio Muhammadi* has to do with an emulation of the acts, the character traits or, to put it differently, the virtues of the Prophet. Secondly he recited the following verse of the Qur’ān:³

You have certainly a beautiful example in the Messenger of Allāh.

Imām al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) expresses this interpretation of the concept of imitation:⁴ ‘You need to know that the key to happiness is the following of the *sunna* (it includes the specific words, habits, practices and silent approvals of the Prophet) and the emulation of

¹ A translation into Dutch appeared in 2000. The English version came out in 2012 with Asma Publications in Ajmer, India.

² The exact number of ‘names’ is unknown. Some mention a number of 2,020, while others refer to 1,000 names. Hazrat Shārib discusses a small number hereof.

³ Qur’ān 33:21.

⁴ See his *Kitāb al-Arba’in fī Usūl ad-Dīn*.

the Messenger of Allāh in his coming and going, in his movement and in his resting, in his way of eating, sleeping, getting up and speaking... I'm not only referring to his religious habits..., but to all of his habits'.

The *Qur'an* mentions at several places the importance of this imitation. Allāh says this about it:⁵

Say: 'If you love Allah, then follow me and Allah will love you'.

Allāh has also stated: ⁶

And whatever the Messenger has given you, take that and what he has forbidden to you, refrain from it.

The intention of the imitation of the Prophet is that you may come closer to Allāh. The imitation of the Prophet is not a goal in itself. The knowledge which has been revealed by means of the Prophet functions as a medicine for your heart and is necessary for your spiritual development. A Muslim is therefore someone with inward peace that has been derived by submission to Allāh.

There exist a number of excellent biographies of the Prophet⁷, and that is why only a short description of his life will be given in this introduction. The birth of Muhammad (Allāh's blessing and peace be with him) takes place 570 years after the birth of Jesus. He receives this name from his grandfather. The meaning of this name is 'the highly praised'. His father, 'Abdullāh, dies before his birth. His

⁵ *Qur'an* 3:31.

⁶ *Qur'an* 59:7.

⁷ Martin Lings has written an inspiring biography called *Muhammad*, which has been published by George Allen & Unwin; London. We also recommend *The life of Muhammad: A translation of Ibn Ishāq's Sirat Rasūl Allāh* in the edition of A. Guillaume; Oxford University Press; *Muhammad Messenger of Allāh - Ash-Shifā' of Qādī 'Iyād*; Madina Press.

mother (who dies when he is six years old) sends him to Halīma, a foster-mother who belongs to a tribe coming from the desert.

The women of the desert tribes come to Mecca two times a year to collect newly born children in order to earn some money. Some of the tribes have a high reputation for nursing children. The children thus spend the first years of their lives in healthy surroundings. They in fact experience ‘fresh air for the breast⁸, pure Arabic for the tongue and freedom for the soul’.

It so happens that one day Halīma does not know where the boy is who has been entrusted to her care. She gets very frightened, but fortunately he returns unharmed to her. When Mawlānā Rūmī, the renowned poet and Sūfī, writes about this event, he does so by using these comforting words:⁹

Do not worry!

You have not lost him.

He is someone in whom

The whole world will be lost.

After the death of his mother, his grandfather, ‘Abdul Muttalib, starts caring for the young orphan. He, however, has soon to say goodbye to his grandfather as well, because he dies only two years later than his mother. Abū Tālib, his uncle, then accepts the responsibility for him.

During his youth Muhammad (Allāh’s blessing and peace be with him) is allowed to help his uncle. Abū Tālib is a trader and performs travels in order to trade. Two times his nephew accompanies him to Syria. When he is about twenty-five years old, he

⁸ Martin Lings: *Muhammad*, p. 23.

⁹ *Masnawī* 4:976.

receives the request of a rich widow called Khadīja to be the one in charge of her trade caravan to Syria. She becomes favourably impressed by his personal qualities. See notices that he is honest, friendly, conscientious and virtuous. That is why she asks him if he wants to marry her. The marriage lasts for twenty-five years, until the death of Khadīja, and it is a very good and happy marriage. They get four daughters and also three sons, but they do not live long.

Muhammad (Allāh's blessing and peace be with him) has a contemplative character. That is why he regularly sits in retreat in a cave at Hirā', which is a mountain about 3 km north of Mecca. It is here that he meditates and reflects on many things. When he is forty years old he receives his first revelation. The angel Gabriel recites several lines from the Qur'ān. Shortly hereafter Allāh makes it clear to him by means of the angel Gabriel that he has been chosen to spread the message of Islām.

During a period of three years the Prophet only preaches in a small circle. His number of followers is less than thirty. He later on receives the command to speak in public about Islām. He talks about the divine unity in Mecca. This implies a direct attack on the idols of the people of Mecca. They respond in a furious way.

The message of the Prophet has a revolutionary force. Not only the self-made gods are being rejected, but the corruption, the hypocritical attitude and immorality are also denounced. The Meccans try to influence the Prophet in all kinds of ways in order to stop him spreading his message. They try to bribe him by offering him women, money, and powerful positions. They also threaten him, but nothing stops him. He keeps on enunciating that there is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger.

Somewhat later the Meccans continue with a cruel persecution of the Prophet and his followers. Some Muslims are tortured in such a

merciless way that they expire. The persecution becomes unbearable, and that is why the Prophet gives his permission to a number of Muslims to emigrate temporarily to Ethiopia.

The Muslim refugees explain to the Ethiopian king as follows what the religion of Islām implies:¹⁰ 'O king! We were an ignorant people, worshipping idols, eating corpses, committing abominations, breaking natural ties, treating guests badly, and our strong devoured our weak. Thus we were until Allāh sent us a Messenger whose lineage, truth, trustworthiness, and clemency we know. He summoned us to acknowledge Allāh's unity and to worship Him and to renounce the stones and images which we and our fathers formerly worshipped. He commanded us to speak the truth, to keep our promises, to be mindful of the ties of kinship and the rights of our neighbours, and to refrain from crimes and bloodshed. He forbade us to commit abominations and to speak lies, and to devour the property of orphans, to vilify chaste women. He commanded us to worship Allāh alone and not to associate anything with Him and he gave us orders about prayer, almsgiving and fasting...'.¹¹

The Prophet is taken on his heavenly journey (*mi'rāj*) in the year 621 C.E. The archangel Gabriel is his guide to Jerusalem, where he meets the previous prophets and leads them in the prayer. After this the ascension of the Prophet takes place. He encounters several prophets in his nocturnal ascent through the seven heavens. Finally he comes very near to Allāh Himself. All these experiences strengthen him inwardly. This helps him to continue with his difficult task. The *Qur'ān* describes the *mi'rāj* thus:¹¹

¹⁰ Taken with minor changes from *The life of Muhammad: A translation of Ibn Ishāq's Sirat Rasūl Allāh* by A. Guillaume; pp. 151-152.

¹¹ *Qur'ān* 17:1.

*Glory be to Him,
Who carried His servant by night
From the sacred mosque (in Mecca)
To the farthest mosque (in Jerusalem),
Whose precincts We did bless,
In order that We might show him some of Our signs;
For He is the Hearer, the Seer.*

Among all the spiritual states the one of the *mi'rāj* is the highest. The *mi'rāj* is certainly the summit of the spiritual glory given by Allāh to His Prophet.¹²

He saw indeed the greatest of the signs of his Lord.

Two years after the *mi'rāj*, the small, weak group of Muslims receives help from an unexpected side. A number of people living in Yathrib, an oasis to the north of Mecca, arrive in Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. They meet the Prophet and tell him about the social and political tensions between certain factions in their town. He invites them to Islām, and they accept this invitation. When the Meccan Muslims, sometimes one by one, emigrate to Yathrib, the Prophet also settles in the same town, which soon thereafter is called the town of the Prophet or shortly Medina. The Prophet succeeds to find a solution for the internal problems of Medina.

The Meccans consider the fast-growing community of Muslims to be a threat. They intend to attack Medina. Allāh makes it clear to the Prophet, who has demonstrated a mild attitude during

¹² *Qur'ān* 53:18.

fifteen years, that the Muslims receive permission to defend themselves against attacks on their community.¹³

Fighting is prescribed for you,

And it is hateful to you.

But it is possible that you hate a thing

And it is good for you,

And it is possible that you love a thing

And it is bad for you.

Allāh knows and you know not.

Several battles take place. Muhammad (Allāh's blessing and peace be with him) sets his heart on conquering Mecca, which happens in a bloodless way. In 630 CE the city of his birth acknowledges his rule. The Prophet, however, returns to his family in Medina.

After the revelation of the *sūra* an-Nasr, the Prophet understands - according to Ibn 'Abbās¹⁴ - that his death is near. His task is now complete. When the Prophet recites this chapter for the first time, Abū Bakr¹⁵ is the only companion of the Prophet who starts to cry, because he is the most knowledgeable of the people about the Prophet. He knows that it means that Allāh has announced the death of the Prophet to the Prophet himself. The ones present are shocked, wondering at the crying of Abū Bakr, because they are not aware of the reason for that.

¹³ *Qur'an* 2:216.

¹⁴ Ibn Kathīr: *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, vol. IV; p. 321.

¹⁵ See pp. 92-93 of *The Openings in Makka*; Book 3.

On June 8, 632 CE, the Prophet breathes his last in Medina. Everyone is very sad. Abū Bakr, is able to remain calm in the midst of this extremely confusing situation, and says something quite remarkable: ‘If any of you worship Muhammad, you should know that Muhammad is dead. But those of you who worship Allāh, let it be known that Allāh is alive and cannot die’.

‘What made Muhammad so rare a figure in history’ - writes Ira M. Lapidus¹⁶- ‘what made him a Prophet, was his ability to convey his vision to the people around him so that concepts long known to everyone took on the power to transform other people’s lives as they had transformed his. This was accomplished by direct preaching about God, but also by changing family life and institutions, and by introducing new ritual practices, social mores, and political loyalties. Muhammad was a Prophet who caused a religious vision to operate in the body of a whole society’.

The Qur’ānic revelations and the traditions (*ahādīth*) of the Prophet have been important in bringing about this transformation.

The Prophet receives revelations up to shortly before his death. The key themes of the early Qur’ānic revelations include the unity of Allāh, the responsibility of human beings towards their Creator, the resurrection of the dead and Allāh's final judgment. Structural reforms are necessary in Medina and that is why the revelations receive a political and social character.

The revelations of this period ask the believers to imitate the example of the Prophet, because:¹⁷

Whoso obeys the Messenger, obeys Allāh.

¹⁶ Ira M. Lapidus: *A History of Islamic Societies*; p. 35.

¹⁷ *Qur’ān* 4:80.

Apart from the *Qur'ān*, the most treasured teachings in Islām are the traditions of Muhammad (Allāh's blessing and peace be with him) himself, which form the *abādīth*. You can read the words of God in the *Qur'ān*, while you can find the sayings of the Prophet in the *abādīth*. Almost every aspect of human life receives attention therein.

The *sunna* of the Prophet – i.e. all his acts (*fi'l*), his words (*qawl*) and that which he tacitly approved (*taqrīr*), in short, his complete attitude in life – constitutes an important source for the rules of behaviour of a Muslim. The Prophet himself says this about it:¹⁸ 'Who follows me, belongs to me, and who does not love my *sunna*, does not belong to me'. Mawlānā Rūmī states something similar:¹⁹ 'To follow the Messenger of Allāh belongs to the duties of the people who have realized the inward meaning of reality'.

These teachings are not merely an inheritance of a time that belongs to the past. The imitation of the Prophet is not an abstract affair. Muslims consider the moral and spiritual dignity of the Prophet a reality that is very much alive.

Hazrat Zahurul Hasan Shārib has spoken about such and several other subjects, while sitting on a bench in London, but also during his stay in Holland. The result thereof is: *The Imitation of Muhammad* (Allāh's blessing and peace be with him).

Mohammed Sirāj

¹⁸ Annemarie Schimmel: *And Muhammad is His Messenger – The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*; p. 26.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 268. The Mevlevi Sūfī Aflākī quotes Mawlānā Rūmī.

THE QUALITIES OF THE PROPHET



MUHAMMAD

The highly praised

The praised one

This is the personal name of the Prophet. He was named Muhammad by his grandfather, ‘Abdul Muttalib, who was respected for his generosity. The name appears at four places²⁰ in the *Qur’ān*. Literally, the name means the one deserving all the praise and adoration, and the one free from any defect or shortcoming.

To emulate the name, you should be whole-heartedly engaged in praise and adoration of Allāh, so that the blessings of Allāh may be secured.

Qur’ān 47:2

And those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in what has been sent down upon Muhammad - and it is the truth from their Lord - He will remove from them their misdeeds and improve their condition.

²⁰ See the index of Qur’ānic verses.

أحمد

AHMAD

The most commendable

The praiseworthy

The one who engages in too much adoration and praise

This is also a personal name of the Prophet. His mother Āmīna, in pursuance of the direction in her dream, named him Ahmad. The name appears in the Qur’ān only once. The name implies that he was engaged in so much adoration and praise of Allāh that he became Ahmad, which means most commendable and praiseworthy. At first he was named Ahmad and subsequently he was named Muhammad. The Prophet points out thus:²¹ ‘I am Ahmad in the heavens and Muhammad on earth’.

Al-Muwatta’, the collection of *abādīth* by Imām Mālik, contains a chapter on the names of the Prophet. It states:²² ‘Mālik related to me from Ibn Shihāb from Muhammad ibn Jubayr ibn al-Mut’im that the prophet, may Allāh bless him and grant him peace, said: “I have five names. I am Muhammad. I am Ahmad. I am al-Māhi (the effacer), by whom Allāh effaces *kufr*. I am al-Hāshir (the gatherer), before whom people are gathered. I am al-‘Āqib (the last)”.’

To emulate the name, you should adorn and praise Allāh.

Qur’ān 61:6

And when Jesus, the son of Mary, said: ‘O children of Israel! I am the Messenger of Allāh to you, confirming what came before me of the Torah and giving the good news of an Messenger who will come after me, whose name will be Ahmad

²¹ *Sabīh al-Bukhārī*. The name Ahmad is mentioned in the *Sabīh al-Bukhārī* (vol. 4; p. 481), in the *Sabīh Muslim* (vol. 4; p. 1254) and in *Al-Muwatta’* of Imām Mālik (p. 513), because all these collections of *abādīth* have a chapter pertaining to the names of the Prophet.

²² *Al-Muwatta’*; Diwan Press; p. 513 of the English translation.

محمود

MAHMŪD

The praised

The praiseworthy

The laudable

The worthy

Allāh describes two outstanding aspects of the Prophet in the verse of the *Qur'ān* given below. In this world, his distinguishing quality is related to his offering the midnight prayer. The second aspect points to his occupying the post of honour and glory, the *maqām al-mahmūd*. Because of his being raised to a 'spiritual station of praise and glory', he is called Mahmūd. He will intercede on behalf of the people on the Day of Judgment. Seeing his occupying the *maqām al-mahmūd*, the people will praise him all the more.

To emulate the name, you should cultivate those qualities, which made the Prophet praiseworthy.

Qur'ān 17:79

And during a part of the night, say an additional prayer; maybe your Lord will raise you to a spiritual station of praise and glory!

قاسم

QĀSIM

The distributor

The one who allots

The Prophet has said:²³ ‘Allāh is the Giver and I am the distributor’. Allāh is the Source of supply and through the Prophet the things are distributed. This is shown in the verse of the *Qur’ān* given below. The Prophet has said, according to Abū Hurayrah:²⁴ ‘Neither do I give you anything and nor do I withhold anything from you. I am only a distributor. Wherever I am ordered to distribute, I spend there’.

To emulate the name, you should share with others the good things of life, given to you. You should be generous. You should not be a monopolist, not allowing others to partake the gifts of life.

Qur’ān 9:59

If only they had been satisfied with what Allāh and His Messenger gave them, and had said: ‘Sufficient unto us is Allāh! Allāh and His Messenger will soon give us of His bounty...’.

²³ *Sabīh al-Bukhārī.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

ماحي

MĀHI

The one who destroys

The annihilator

The effacer

The Prophet has said that he has five names²⁵ and that Māhī is one among those five names. He brought about a transformation and change in the world. Through his teachings idolatry, barbarism, brutality and deviation lost their hold. He abolished ignorance in such a way as the full moon abolishes darkness.

To emulate the name, you should stand by truth and lend support to the forces of righteousness and upright living.

Qur'an 17:81

And say: 'Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished; certainly falsehood is ever bound to vanish'.

²⁵ See the *hadith* that has been quoted when discussing the name Ahmad.