# The Prophet's Character and Example

The Prophet's character, why his actions are an example for individuals (including his treatment of women and non-Muslims) and for Muslim communities and states, and his role as Seal of the Prophets.

## His character

The Qur'an calls the Prophet (pbuh) "an excellent example" (Sura 33:21) and says he is "of great moral character" (Sura 68:4). Aishah said that "his character was the Qur'an". Qualities often described:

| Quality | Example |
|---|---|
| **Honesty and trustworthiness** | Called *al-Amin* before prophethood; even his enemies left valuables with him. At the Hijrah **Ali** returned the deposits left in his care |
| **Patience** | He bore insults and persecution in Makka and the stoning at **Ta'if** without revenge |
| **Forgiveness and mercy** | The general amnesty at the **conquest of Makka**; he forgave people who had harmed him and prayed for those of Ta'if |
| **Humility** | He mended his own clothes and sandals, helped with housework, and sat with the poor |
| **Generosity** | He gave away what he received and often had little for himself |
| **Justice** | He treated all alike, and said that if his own daughter Fatimah stole he would apply the punishment |
| **Courage and leadership** | He stood firm at **Uhud** and **Hunayn** |
| **Kindness** to children, animals, the poor and orphans | He played with children and forbade cruelty to animals |

## Events that show each quality

The [10] question asks you to **write about events**, not just to name qualities. Learn three or four events for each.

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| Quality | Events |
| --- | --- |
| **Patience** | When the Companions asked him to curse the Quraysh he said: "I was not sent to curse but as a mercy." The Quraysh whistled and clapped to disturb his prayer. Abu Jahl's man threw camel entrails on him while he prayed and he did not react (his daughter Fatimah cleaned him). At **Ta'if** he was stoned, and he refused the angel's offer to crush the town, saying he hoped God would raise believers from their children |
| **Honesty and trustworthiness** | **Al-Amin** and **as-Sadiq**. The Quraysh trusted him to settle the **Black Stone** dispute. Abu Jahl said "I do not say you are a liar; I disagree with what you bring". At **Safa** the Quraysh admitted they had never known him to lie. He earned double profit for Khadijah. At the Hijrah, with his life in danger, he left **Ali** to return the deposits |
| **Humility and simplicity** | He patched his own sandals and clothes, did housework (Aishah said he milked goats and swept), slept on a mat and a pillow of palm fibre, ate coarse bread and often only dates, and told Companions not to stand up for him. He visited the sick and accepted a slave's invitation. He entered Makka as conqueror with his head bowed to his saddle. He said "Do not praise me as the Christians praised the son of Mary: I am a servant, so say the servant and Messenger of God" |
| **Justice and equality** | He worked on the **mosque** and the **trench** like the others and gathered firewood on a journey. He refused to free his uncle **Abbas** after Badr without the ransom. When a Muslim was found killed at Khaybar and the Jews could not be proved guilty, he paid the blood money from the treasury. A noblewoman of the Makhzum clan stole, and he refused **Usamah's** plea for her: "If Fatimah did this, I would cut off her hand". He ruled in favour of a Jew against a Muslim in a business dispute |
| **Generosity** | He gave most in Ramadan and never kept money overnight. He once gave a man sheep filling the space between two hills. When he had given away 70,000 dirhams and one more beggar came, he borrowed to give. He repaid a debt with more than he owed |
| **Mercy and forgiveness** | At Makka he forgave **Abu Sufyan, Wahshi** (the killer of his uncle Hamzah), **Hind** and **Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl**. At Uhud when his face was wounded he said "O God, forgive my people for they do not know". He prayed for **Abdullah ibn Ubayy**, the leader of the hypocrites, after he died |
| **Keeping promises** | He returned **Abu Jandal** under the terms of Hudaybiyyah. When two Muslims who had promised the Quraysh not to fight at Badr came to him, he sent them away even though he needed men. Even **Abu Sufyan**, then an enemy, told Heraclius that the Prophet had never broken a promise |

## His importance as an example for individuals

Muslims follow his **Sunnah** in worship and daily life. His example guides them in:

- **Prayer, fasting, charity and Hajj**: he taught the **details** of how to perform them.
- **Honesty in business** and fair dealing.

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- **Family life:** he was **kind, helped at home** and said that "the best of you is the best to his family".
- **Kindness to neighbours and guests, the poor and orphans.**
- **Patience** in hardship.

### Women

- He **honoured and protected** women: he forbade the burying of baby girls, taught that **daughters** are a blessing and said that **paradise lies at the feet of mothers**.
- Women have rights to **inheritance, property, consent in marriage, and education** (he said seeking knowledge is a duty on every Muslim).
- He **consulted** his wives (for example **Umm Salamah** at Hudaybiyyah) and women took part in public life as traders, teachers (**Aishah**) and nurses in battle.
- His Farewell Sermon told men to **treat women well**.

### Non-Muslims

- The **Constitution of Madina** protected **Jews** and gave them religious freedom.
- He treated **Christians** with respect (the Christians of Najran were allowed to pray in his mosque), and Muslims found safety with the Christian **Negus** of Abyssinia.
- The Qur'an says "there is **no compulsion in religion**" (Sura 2:256).
- He forgave **former enemies** at Makka, and allowed prisoners at Badr to be freed if each taught ten Muslim children to read.
- He kept **treaties** (at Hudaybiyyah he accepted terms that seemed to disadvantage Muslims, and kept them).

## His importance as an example for Muslim communities and states

- **Government by consultation (shura):** he consulted the Companions (for example about **Badr**, the **Trench** and **Uhud**).
- **Justice and equal law** for all, whatever a person's rank or religion.
- **Treaties and peace:** the Constitution of Madina and **Hudaybiyyah** show that Muslims should keep agreements and prefer **peace**.
- **Defence, not aggression:** the battles were fought to **protect** the community; he told fighters not to harm **women, children, the old, clergy, trees and crops**.
- **Diplomacy:** he sent letters and envoys to neighbouring rulers.

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- **Welfare:** he organised **zakat** and care for the poor, orphans and travellers.
- **Forgiveness after victory** at Makka.
- **Education:** the Prophet's Mosque was also a school.
- He treated **envoys** of other states with honour, receiving them in the mosque and serving them himself.
- He said: "Whoever wrongs a person who has a covenant with the Muslims, or burdens him beyond his ability, I will be his opponent on the Day of Resurrection."
- He sent his **letters** to rulers with a seal, and when the Negus died he prayed for him.

## His significance as Seal of the Prophets and last Messenger

- The Qur'an (Sura 33:40) calls him the **Seal of the Prophets** (*Khatam an-Nabiyyin*): **no prophet will come after him**.
- His message **completes** the guidance of earlier prophets (**Adam, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa**) and is **for all humanity**, not one people.
- The **Qur'an** is the **final revelation** and is **preserved**, so Muslims do not expect another book.
- His **Sunnah** shows how to live the Qur'an. Muslims love and honour him, send **blessings** on him, and pronounce **"Muhammad is the Messenger of God"** in the shahada.
- **Muslims respect all prophets**; belief in the finality of Muhammad (pbuh) is **central** to Muslim faith.
- The Prophet described himself as the **last brick** in a beautiful building which was complete except for one brick (Bukhari, Muslim). He also said that every prophet had been sent to his own people, but he had been sent to **all humanity** (34:28, 21:107).
- The earlier books were changed or lost, were given to one people for a period, and did not give a complete code. The Qur'an has been **preserved** (15:9) and completes the religion (5:3).

**When asked about the importance of his actions as an example, give a specific action (for example the amnesty at Makka) and explain what Muslims learn from it today (for example forgiveness in personal disputes and humane treatment of defeated opponents).**

TRY IT

Explain why the actions of the Prophet (pbuh) are important as an example for Muslim communities in their relations with other states.

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**Outline.** *Treaties:* Constitution of Madina and Hudaybiyyah, so Muslims keep agreements and prefer peace. *Justice and humane conduct:* rules of battle (no harm to civilians or crops), forgiveness at Makka. *Diplomacy:* letters to rulers, envoys. *Shura:* consulting before decisions. *Tolerance:* freedom of religion for Jews and Christians. *Judgement:* his example gives a basis for peaceful, just and humane relations between states today.

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