

## COMMUNICATIVE EXCELLENCE of the traditions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)

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### ABSTRACT

The Serah (life and practices) of the Holy Prophet (SAW) is quite comprehensive, complete and practicable in all aspects and dimensions. It successfully competes all standards set by the developing human wisdom from time to time; rather provides guidance to them. One of the most important fields of knowledge and dominance today is communication, which has narrowed down the distances and turned the world into a global village. So, it is all the more important today to have proper expertise to communicate successfully with the people of different cultures, languages and civilizations. The Holy Prophet (SAW) in each capacity i.e. as a leader, legislator, judge, statesman, law giver and a preacher was primarily to convey to the mankind all what was revealed unto him from Almighty Allah. This article seeks to examine various techniques and methods used by the Holy Prophet (SAW) in order to communicate his message effectively. This aspect of Serah of the Holy Prophet (SAW), if studied properly, can illuminate the way for humanity in this field.

### INTRODUCTION

The holy Prophet's Serah is multi-dimensional and ideal for mankind in each capacity. As a private person, he was a husband, father, friend and businessman; as a public figure, he was a leader, legislator, judge, statesman and general; as a Messenger of Allah, he was a law-giver, preacher, theologian, saint and mystic. Such a combination is unique in history. In all the aforementioned capacities, the Prophet SAW was primarily to communicate to the mankind all what was revealed unto him from Almighty Allah.

The Holy Quran says in Surah Al-Maida:

“You should know that it is our Messenger's duty to convey (the message) in the clearest way.” (1)

Again, The Quran says in the same Surah:

“The Duty of the Messenger (SAW) is nothing but to convey (the message) (2)

The Quran addresses the holy Prophet (SAW) and says:

“O Messenger (Muhammad SAW)! Proclaim (the message) which has been sent down to you from your Lord. And

if you do not, then you have not conveyed His Message.” (3)

Interpreting this verse, Abdullah ibn-e-Abbas (RA) says that it means if the Prophet (SAW) hides even a single verse (which is surely impossible), then he has not conveyed the message of Allah. (4)

In all the above-mentioned three verses, the word ‘balaagh’ and ‘tableegh’ is used for conveying the message. Imam Raaghib Isfahani, the renowned etymologist, explains these words in this way:

“‘Buloogh’ and ‘balaagh’ is to take a thing to its extreme and highest level (i.e perfection) whether it is related to time, place or some matter.” (5)

Almighty Allah advises His Prophet (SAW):

“Speak to them an effective word to reach their innerselves.” (6)

Here the word ‘Balaagh’ is used. Raaghib Isfahani, while explaining this word, says that it has two kinds.

1. The first one is that the word should be effective and perfect in meaning in itself. For the purpose, it is necessary

that the word must have three characteristics. It must be

- (i) Literally correct.
  - (ii) Closer to the intended meaning and
  - (iii) True and accurate in itself.
2. The second kind is that the person who utters the word must be true and effective and the word should leave the intended effect on the one who listens to it. (7)

Moreover, in one of the verses mentioned above, Almighty Allah has addressed His Prophet (SAW) with the word (Rasool) i.e Messenger which throws light on the major responsibility of the Prophet (SAW) as being communicator of Allah's message. Though the life of the Prophet (SAW) had many capacities and aspects, as indicated above, but his expertise to effectively communicate Allah's message is the most dominating and pervasive one. Therefore, it needs much more emphasis especially in this age of communication. Today, only that message receives acceptance which is conveyed more tactfully and in a masterly manner.

Muhammad (SAW) has been the most successful of all the Prophets (A.S) of Almighty Allah. His unique teachings brought a revolution in the lives of his followers. He successfully conveyed the message of Allah to the masses and accordingly converted his people into a strong and disciplined nation.

The renowned English scholar George Bernard Shaw writes:

“During this short period of 23 years of his prophethood, he changed the complete Arabian Peninsula from Paganism and idolatry to the worship of One God, from tribal quarrels and wars to national solidarity and cohesion,

from lawlessness and anarchy to disciplined living, from utter bankruptcy to the highest standards of moral excellence”. (8)

Communication is not merely the matter of sending a message, rather it comprises various methods to transfer concepts to the receptive ears and establish them firmly in the people's minds and hearts. The Prophet (SAW) used different approaches in dealing with different people in different circumstances. Some of the techniques found in the sayings and actions of the holy Prophet (SAW) to communicate his message effectively may be counted as follows: (Here is given only one or two examples with each technique otherwise an inquisitive mind may find a great deal of them in Hadith literature.)

#### **Drawing Lines**

Modern communication demands the communicator to use visual aids like map, black board, white board etc in order to add eyes with ears to receive the message. The Prophet (SAW) used this technique on various occasions.

- Abdullah Ibn-e-Masood (RA) narrates that one day the Prophet (SAW) drew a straight line on the ground and said, “this is the straight path of Allah”. Then drew small lines on the right and left side of the main straight line and then said, “on each small line, there is a Satan calling people towards himself”. And then the Prophet recited the aayah (verse) “And this is My straight path, so follow it. Follow not other ways, lest you be parted from His way. This has He ordained for you that you may ward off (evil).” (9)

In this tradition, the Prophet (SAW) made his companions understand a Quranic verse by drawing lines on the

ground and thus brought home to them an apparently complex idea.

- Narrates Abdullah (RA) that the Prophet SAW drew a square and then drew a line in the middle of it and let it extend out side the square and then drew several small lines attached to that central line, and said, “this is the human being, and this, (the square) is his lease of life, encircles him from all sides (or has encircled him), and this (line), which is outside, (the square) is his hope, and these small lines are the calamities and troubles (which may befall him), and if one misses him, another will snap him, and if the other misses him, a third will snap him”. (10)

Here the situation was a bit more complicated. A man, his short span of life, his hopes and worries could not be explained in words as clearly and elaborately as in map and drawing. The Prophet SAW clarified a complex issue in a very simple manner.

### **Giving Examples**

Example is a powerful means to explain an abstract and invisible fact and make it familiar to the listeners. The message of Allah to the world was theoretical and Almighty Allah sent his Prophet (SAW) with His Book in order to transform His commandments into practice. He also enjoined his Prophet (SAW) to explain whatever is revealed to him.

“And We have also sent down unto you the Dhikr (reminder and the advice) that you explain clearly to men what is sent down to them, and that they may give thought”. (11)

The Holy Prophet (SAW), on his part, then left no stone unturned in elucidating the

message of Allah. He came up with examples and similes for the purpose.

The idea of the Muslims’ brotherhood and their being an organic whole was mentioned by the Prophet SAW with the example of a building and its constituents.

- Narrates Abu Musa (R.A) that the Prophet SAW said, “a believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts enforce each other. The Prophet SAW then clasped his hands with the fingers inter laced”. (12)

The idea of mutual unity of the Muslims and their readiness to be always there to help and enforce one another could not be better explained.

In another tradition the Holy Prophet (SAW) likened a Muslim to a date-palm tree, the leaves of which do not fall. So, a Muslim is always fresh and fruitful and never undergoes autumnal leaves-shedding.

- Narrated Ibn-e-Umar (RA): The Propher (SAW) said, “Amongst the trees, there is a tree the leaves of which do not fall and is like a Muslim. Tell me the name of that Tree?” Everybody started thinking about the trees of desert areas. And I (the narrator) thought of the date palm tree but felt shy to answer. The others then asked, “What is that tree, O Allah’s apostle?” he replied, “It is the date-palm tree.” (13)

It is a beautiful and complete example, of course. A date palm tree is less demanding more paying, stands steadfast in all circumstances, faces autumn and bad weather boldly and is fruitful to the last part. Its trunk, branches, leaves, bunches and even thorns are used as raw material in different cottage industries and

decoration items. Its fruit can be preserved easily for a long period. A real Muslim is definitely like a date palm tree.

### **Different Answers To Similar Questions**

An effective communication demands that the choice of words should be very selective i.e. not everything for everyone. While going through the books of traditions, we find that the holy Prophet (SAW) replied differently to similar questions arisen by the companions (RA).

- Narrated Abu Musa (RA), some people asked Allah's apostle (SAW) "Whose Islam is the best?" (i.e. who is a very good Muslim?) He replied "One who avoids harming the Muslims with his tongue and hands" (14)

On another occasion, in reply to a similar question, the answer of the holy Prophet (SAW) was different.

- Narrated Abdullah bin Amr: A man asked the Prophet (SAW), "What sort of deeds (or what qualities of) Islam are good?" the Prophet (SAW) replied "To feed (the poor) and greet those whom you know and those whom you do not know." (15)

Such examples can be found in abundance in Hadith literature in which the questioners raised almost similar questions, but the Prophet SAW changed his reply, keeping in view position or actual liking of a questioner or may be a need of the hour. This might go an extra mile in adding devotion to the belief of a person or enhancing general good of Islam and believers. If we classify the good deeds, which the Prophet SAW mentioned in reply to various such questions, they may be divine obligations, human rights, devotion of heart, love for humanity and

steadfastness on the right path. This is, of course, the whole of Islam.

### **Telling Things In Numbers**

The communicator can make a message easy to understand and remember for audience by dividing it into portions and then delivering it in numbers like first, second, third and so on and so forth. In Hadith literature, we find a considerable portion of such traditions in which things are told in numbers. Some of them are mentioned below.

- Narrated Anas (RA) that the Prophet (SAW) said, "Whoever possesses the following three qualities will have the sweetness (delight) of faith:
  - i. The one to whom Allah and His Apostle become dearer than anything else.
  - ii. Who loves a person only for Allah's sake?
  - iii. Who hates to revert to Atheism (disbelief) as he hates to be thrown into the fire" (16)

There are many other traditions of the same type. This seems all the more important to enumerate things and mention them in numbers, when we see the fact that most of the audience of the holy Prophet SAW were to depend on their memory. So, he made it easy for them to retain his words.

### **Putting Questions**

One of the effective techniques to grab full attention of the listeners is considered to be putting questions on them. It awakes even those who might be in slumber or sitting less attentive. Such traditions are also in great numbers which contain questions put by the holy Prophet (SAW) on his audience.

- Muaz Ibn Jabal (RA) reported that Allah's Messenger (SAW) asked, "Do you realize what right Allah has over his slaves?" Muaz said, "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said, "His rights over them are that they should worship Him and not associate anything with Him." He then asked, "Do you realize what is their right over Him if they perform that?" Muaz said Allah and His Messenger know best." The Prophet (SAW) said, "That He should not punish them." (17)

Most of the questions put by the holy Prophet SAW in the above traditions could, obviously, not be answered by the companions. Neither does it seem the intention of the Prophet SAW. So, the only reason behind them could be to heighten the frequency of attention of the listeners.

#### **Arising Questions in the Minds of the Audience**

Man has instinctive attraction for change. Flat and monotonous state of affairs soon makes him bored and frustrated. Therefore, he demands continuous change to remain fresh and attentive. One of the tools of change in communication is to adopt such style which, on one hand answers questions while on the other, induces new questions in the minds of the listeners. Such traditions are also in great number in which the holy Prophet (SAW) raised questions and then gave their answers. Some of them are as under:-

- Narrated Abu Shuraih that the holy Prophet (SAW) said, "By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!" It was asked, "who is that O Allah's Apostle?" He said, "That person whose neighbour does not feel safe from his mischief. (18)

Here, the Prophet SAW instead of giving instructions in narrative style adopted such

mode, which enhanced curiosity of the audience. Accordingly, they requested for clarification.

In other words, the holy Prophet (SAW) said something which increased thirst more than it appeased. Some traditions contain words which need to be explained, while others serve as *teasers* (a popular term of today's communication meaning that to give incomplete information which enforces the audience / viewers to sit patiently in order to listen / view the whole of it). Therefore, the companions curiously asked for more detail and only then the Prophet (SAW) completed his message. Thus the words heard by the curious ears had a lasting effect, just as a line on the stone.

#### **Answering Questions**

One of the effective tools of communication is to speak only when it is requested and to tell only what is asked. Today we see that after extensive lectures and seminars, there are held question-answer sessions which help a lot in clarifying the concepts of the participants and enable them to play an active role in the ongoing activity. Some traditions of the holy Prophet (SAW) indicate that such sessions were held in which the questions were invited and properly answered. Some of them are as under.

- Narrated Abdullah Ibn-e-Amr (RA), that it was said to the Messenger of Allah, "which of the people is best?" He said, "Everyone who is pure of heart and sincere of speech." They said, "Sincere of speech, we know what this is, but what is pure of heart?" He said "It is (the heart) that is pious and pure, with no sin injustice, rancor or envy in it." (19)

Such traditions contain a great variety of questions, which range from personal life to collective life, from this world to world hereafter and from generation present at that time to those likely to come in future. It shows that questions were encouraged and properly answered. This played a vital role in clarifying different aspects of Islam.

### **One to One Contact with the Individuals**

One of the common problems faced by those who have to communicate to larger groups of people, is that the message is not properly conveyed to each and every individual. The participants have different backgrounds, different mental calibers and even different levels of understanding and potentials of reception. Therefore, the speaker needs to adopt techniques to focus special attention on each and every individual and establish one to one contact with them. The holy Prophet (SAW) had to convey his message to every individual present before him and then, through him, to the whole humanity. Thus everyone was not only to understand himself properly, rather convey the same to the coming generations. The holy Prophet (SAW) used various techniques to give special attention to every individual. Some of them are as follows:

### **Holding hand or shoulder of an individual**

If a person converses with the other and at the same time holds his hand or shoulder with his own hand it proves a very effective tool to catch full attention of an individual. Some of the traditions are tinged in this colour.

- Abdullah Bin Umar (RA) said that Allah's Apostle took hold of his shoulder and said, "Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a traveler" (20)

To detach from one thing needs strong attachment with some thing else. The Prophet's SAW hand on shoulder was a symbol of making this relation stronger than all others and pinning all interest on the coming life, which is eternal.

There are many other such traditions which start with the words that the holy Prophet (SAW) was holding hand of the companion (the narrator of that tradition) into his hand. These are, in fact, gestures of love and affection which go a long way in capturing complete attention of the target individual.

### **Addressing an individual by his name**

The holy Prophet (SAW), sometimes, singled out anyone of his companions and addressed him by his name. It was a matter of great proud for the companion that the Prophet (SAW) said these words after addressing him by his name. Such feelings could not let him think of forgetting those words. Some of the examples are as under.

- Narrated Abu Zar Ghiffari (RA) that the holy Prophet (SAW) said to him, "O Abu Zar! There is no wisdom like reflection, no caution like restraint and no honour like good manners." (21)
- Aisha (RA the wife of Allah's Apostle (SAW) reported that Allah's Messenger (SAW) said, "O Aisha, verily Allah is Kind and He loves kindness and confers upon kindness which he does not confer upon severity and does not confer upon anything else besides it (kindness). (22)

One, who is addressed by name, pays full attention to the speaker and definitely

reciprocates this gesture of love and listens with the core of his heart.

### iii) Advices

Exhortation and advice play a pivotal role in removing communication barriers. A large number of sayings of the Prophet SAW contain exhortations for his companions in order to make their hearts tender and their minds ready to endure hardships in this world for the best rewards in the world hereafter. Such narrations have been compiled under the title of *Al-Riqaq* in the books of the sayings of the holy Prophet SAW.

- Narrates Ibn Abbas (RA) that the Prophet SAW said “There are two blessings which may people lose: (They are) health and free time for doing well.” (23)
- Narrated Abu Huraira (RA) that the Prophet (SAW) said, “Richness does not mean having a great amount of property, but richness is self-contentment” (24)

These are the Prophet’s SAW advices which he made to some of his companions from time to time. Each and every word is full of love and sympathy. The message is direct, brief, to the point and simple. Such an accurate placing can never miss the target.

### Telling Stories

Human love for stories is as old as the man himself. Since then, story has been adopting different shapes in different times and areas. Currently Drama, Novel, Short Story etc, all are, in fact, forms of a story. Anything told in a story lasts longer in memory as compared to simple narration. The holy Quran has also confirmed the importance of story by telling incidents of good and bad nations of the past; but not for mere enjoyment rather,

“in their history verily there is a lesson for men of understanding.” (25)

There are a number of sayings in which the holy Prophet (SAW) conveyed his message through stories.

- Narrates Abu Masood (RA) that the Prophet (SAW) said that before you (the Muslims), a man was reckoned (by Allah) but no good deed was found (in his account) except that he was an affluent and used to give loans to the people and then would say to his collectors to relieve those (debtors) who were in straitened position. Thus almighty Allah said that we deserve more than others to relieve, so (He ordered His angels to) release him (too). (26)

This, perhaps, the shortest story of the world is highly gripping one and contains all required essentials of a good story. It is full of suspense and keeps along the listeners to the climax (of achieving good reward). It doesn’t have superfluous details or super natural elements. It is a story of a common man who has just a single good deed in his credit. But only that much is enough as it belongs to the general good of humanity. So, it wins for him the complete love of a listener who prays for his better end. The same happens. The story ends on a great hope that even a single act of goodness for human beings can assure Allah’s forgiveness. What a beautiful style to convey an idea of love for humanity!

### Conclusion

The holy Prophet SAW utilized various techniques to communicate his message impressively. He developed personal contact with his audience, gave them examples from day to day life, demonstrated complex ideas with the use of helping aids, put, encouraged and inspired questions, spoke simple and made

his message interesting by folding it in stories. All this indicates that the Prophet SAW went on changing his style and mode of expression and always maintained interest of his audience. This made him “the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels”. (27) Michael H. Hart, in his book ‘The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History’, listed the Prophet SAW on number one and said, “He may well rank as the most influential political leader of all time. (28)

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