

Fast 20: Simplicity of his personal and domestic life

- In the Quran, God says to the Holy Prophet:

“Do not strain your eyes (with desire) at what We have given certain classes of them to enjoy, nor grieve for them, and make yourself gentle to the believers.” — 15:88

لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَانخَفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾

The second part of this verse, “make yourself gentle to the believers”, may also be read under the topic of the last Study, regarding the Holy Prophet’s extraordinary gentleness towards his followers. These words literally mean “lower to them your wing”, i.e. take them under your protection and care. It is in the same words, “lower to them the wing” (*wa-khfid janāha*), that the Quran instructs us to look after elderly parents: “And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy” (17:24).

The first part of this verse shows that the riches and trappings of this life had no temptation for the Holy Prophet. The unequalled simplicity of his life from the time that he married a rich widow to the time that he ruled Arabia may be guessed from the last scene of his life, when he ordered the last penny in his house to be given to the poor.

- The Holy Prophet’s opponents raised the following objection against him:

“And they say: What a Messenger is this? He eats food and goes about in the markets. Why has not an angel been sent down to him to be a warner with him? Or a treasure given to him, or a garden from which to eat?” — 25:7-8

وَقَالُوا مَا لَٰهُذَا الرَّسُولِ يَأْكُلُ الطَّعَامَ وَيَمشِي فِي الْأَسْوَاقِ ۗ لَوْلَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ فَيَكُونُ مَعَهُ نَذِيرًا ۙ أَوْ يُلْقَىٰ إِلَيْهِ كَنْزٌ أَوْ تَكُونُ لَهُ جَنَّةٌ يَأْكُلُ مِنْهَا

The Holy Prophet’s life was one of the utmost simplicity. He did all his work himself. He aided his wives in their household duties, mended his clothes, tied up the goats, and even cobbled his sandals. In fact, his kind and genial nature often led him to do others’ work. Once a woman, unable to work for herself, asked him to lead her into a certain street; he accompanied her there, only taking leave when her work was accomplished. He was a mortal, and partook of the ordinary food of a simple Arab. Hence they speak of him as *eating food*. Going about in markets stands for everyday human activities of all kinds. Their idea of a messenger of God was that he should have worldly treasures and gardens. In fact, wealth was all in all to them and they paid no consideration to the moral, the higher, values of life for which the Prophet came.

- There are many hadith reports which tell of the simplicity of the Holy Prophet’s manner of daily living:

“Hisham said: I asked Aishah, ‘What did the Prophet, may peace and the blessings of Allah be on him, do in his house?’ She replied: ‘He did what one of you would do in his house. He mended sandals and patched garments and did sewing’.” (*Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*, 540)

“Al-Aswad reported that he asked Aishah: ‘What did the Prophet use to do in his house?’ She replied: ‘He used to keep himself busy serving his family and when it was the time for prayer he would go for it’.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, hadith 676)

- When Muslims were becoming prosperous, it was natural that the wives of the Holy Prophet should desire to be furnished with better necessities of life than they had previously enjoyed. But just at this time we find a revelation enjoining the strictest simplicity upon them. It is as follows:

“O Prophet, say to your wives: If you desire this world’s life and its adornment, come, I will give you a provision and allow you to depart in a gracious manner. And if you desire Allah and His Messenger and the abode of the Hereafter, then surely Allah has prepared for the doers of good among you a mighty reward.” — 33:28–29

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ إِن كُنْتُنَّ تُرِدْنَ الْحَيَاةَ
الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا فَتَعَالَيْنَ أُمَتِّعْكُنَّ وَأُسَرِّحْكُنَّ
سَرَاحًا جَمِيلًا ﴿٢٨﴾ وَإِن كُنْتُنَّ تُرِدْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَ
الَّذِينَ فِي الْأَحْزَابِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ الْحَسَنَاتِ مِنَكُنَّ
أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٢٩﴾

If the Prophet had allowed his wives to share in the general prosperity of the community, there could not have been the least objection. But he received a revelation which deprived him and those most nearly related to him of those material benefits which others could easily acquire. The splendours of this world were not forbidden to any Muslim, but such transitory vanities were not to be admitted into the household of God’s Prophet. As he possessed the means, his wives would be allowed to depart with rich and ample gifts, if this was their desire.

The Holy Prophet placed this choice before each of his wives separately. Each one gave the same reply, that they desired “Allah and His Messenger and the abode of the Hereafter”.

Not only did the wives of the Holy Prophet retain the utmost simplicity of life in his lifetime, but even after his death, when the Muslims grew a very wealthy nation and big stipends were paid to the Prophet’s wives, they did not allow wealth to accumulate in their houses but distributed it to deserving people. Of Aishah especially it is related that she was so generous in giving away what came to her that she would sometimes be left without the means for an evening meal.