The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has been widely recognized as one of the greatest leaders the world has ever known. Many point to the remarkable fact that he succeeded in accomplishing what he set out to achieve in an extremely short span of time: a period of twenty-three years. Today as we enter a new year, and face the mammoth challenge of creating a better world, we would do well to reflect on the many lessons from the Prophet of mercy. I would like to review a few of them below.

A Man of God

On a close examination of his life, we are astonished to see the many extraordinary character traits that set him apart from others, which, in no small measure, were responsible for his success. However, at the top of the list is his love of God and wholehearted surrender to His will. His tongue was ever supple with God’s remembrance, his heart always found repose in surrendering to His will, and he set out to do what he did to please Allah alone. His tears in solitude in remembrance of God soaked his blanket. He would often sneak out of the bed he was sharing with his wife. On searching for him, his wife would find him prostrating in a corner communing with his Lord.

His Love for others

The Prophet’s love for God was also manifested in his love for others. His selfless love was deeply felt by everyone who knew him well. His close companions said, anyone who dealt with him on a personal level couldn’t help but love him intensely. How often one finds his enemies - who had
fought hard against him many years - were suddenly turned to become his most ardent supporters? They came from diverse backgrounds: rich and poor, kings and laymen.

His love for others knew no bounds - he endured hunger and thirst in order to sacrifice his comforts for the sake of others. Although he was the ruler of Arabia, days would go by and no fire would be lit in his house, not because he couldn't afford it, but because he preferred to part with everything for the welfare of others. Once he suddenly woke up from sleep remembering that he had a single gold coin saved up; he went out and gave it away in charity and then went back to sleep!

Once his beloved daughter, Fathimah, came to know that the Prophet had received some funds. Being extremely weary of doing hard chores at home, she hoped he could help her pay for a maid’s help to relieve her some of her daily chores such as fetching water from distant wells, grinding grains, etc. The Prophet refused her request saying: “I cannot see the people of Suffah starve. Let me advise you of something far better than having a maid’s help: Make *dhikr* every night before retiring to bed!”

Those rulers who squander the wealth on frivolous luxuries while their own people are starving would do well to take a critical look at the Prophet’s lifestyle.

**Accessible to all**

Allah describes His Messenger saying, "*There has come to you a messenger form among yourselves*" (Qur’an:9:128). Thus, he was literally a man of the people, and accessible to all, rich or poor. In fact, the most vulnerable and weak among the people could always count on him to unload their burdens, and open their hearts to him. They recognized his selfless interest in their concerns. His companions tell us that the maids of Madinah would take him for a walk or sit with him - while he patiently listened to them. Some of the former kings or chiefs of Arabia, having seen this behavior of his, had to exclaim that it was not definitely befitting for a king! They recognized he was indeed a prophet! The Prophet said, "seek me
with the weakest among you.” Among his prayers were: “Lord! Let me live as poor; die as poor, and raise me up in the company of poor!”

**Love for all of God’s creation**

The Prophet’s love for others knew no bounds; it embraced all of God’s creation, big and small. He stressed kindness to all of creation as the quintessential teaching of religion that he wants his followers to imbibe. He told the faithful, “Everyone one of you ought to render acts of charity just as every day the sun shines in the sky!” Then, he pointed out the many ways of rendering acts of charity such as the following: Producing something beneficial for people if you are a producer or helping those who produce - if you are not; seeking to bring about peace between those who are fighting; removing the litter from the streets; speaking a kind word, or guiding someone who is unable to find his way, or simply by bringing joy to a sorrowful heart or by showing kindness to any of God’s creatures.

He also said, “A prostitute was forgiven because of her gesture of compassion to a dog. While she was crossing a path in a desert, she became thirsty, and on finding a well, she went down and quenched her thirst. Upon coming up, she found a dog panting in the dust and said to herself, ‘this dog is as thirsty as I was!’ Saying this, she climbed down the well again and fetched water in her shoes. She offered it to the dog to drink; God thanked her by forgiving her sins on account of her act of compassion!” (Reported by Muslim)

The Prophet's teachings on acts of kindness towards God's creatures, small and big, including dogs, would later move Muslims to earmark endowments to look after dogs and cats. So the rich people set up water tanks in the city and elsewhere for dogs to drink; and some of the saints would seek to please God by preforming the daily chore of cleaning those water tanks, immediately after finishing their morning prayers.