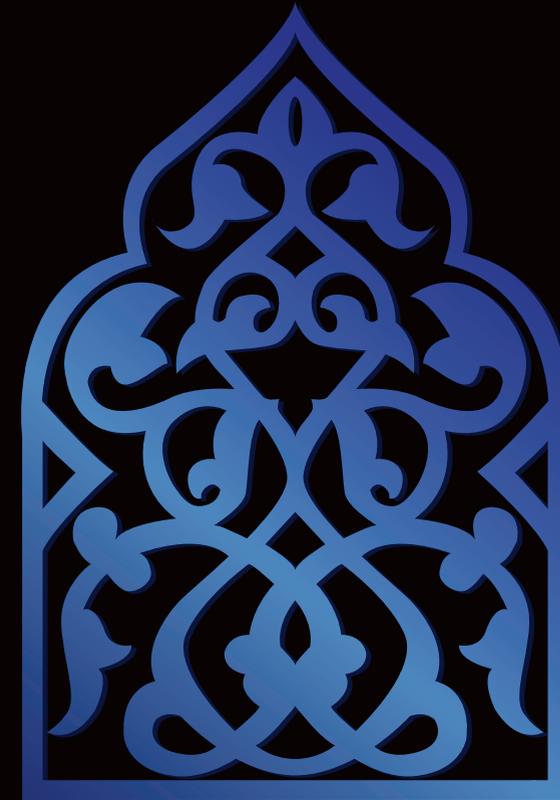


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Muhammed - pbuh as a teacher

Muhummed pbuh as a teacher

Dr Irfan Jehangir



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MUHUMMED PBUH

AS A TEACHER

It is an undeniable fact that some of the most influential people in our lives are teachers. Most of us can remember our very first teacher in school, the one who took us through successfully to teaching us our ABC's and the proper rules of interaction and activities. Be it the high school math teacher who helped us to perfect our Algebra or the college professor that taught us the spirit of debate, the very fabric of our being is heavily influenced by teachers who guided us in our educational journeys. This is why a teacher is rightly said to be the builder of a nation!

Being a teacher therefore, comes with a huge responsibility and is a matter of great honour to be bestowed upon anyone. Muhummed pbuh is the only one teacher who has laid out the groundwork for the mundane as well as spiritual education of mankind, by the Grace of God Almighty. Muhummed pbuh was an illiterate man, chosen by God Almighty to be the last and Final Messenger and a perfect teacher to all mankind.

Muhummed pbuh was charged with the huge responsibility of conveying the message of God through the Quran to all of mankind. However, he was no ordinary teacher. In fact, he set the ideal

standard of education over a thousand years ago and the effects are still being felt today.

There are innumerable ways in which Muhammed pbuh was, and still is, the greatest teacher to have ever lived. Most of us, at some point or another, have come across at least one teacher that was inaudible or spoke so fast that it was next to impossible to understand what was being said let alone taught. Even today, the rapid pace in which most educators speak is overlooked so as to cram as much information into each lesson as possible.

Muhummed pbuh was methodical in his teaching methods and never rushed his lessons. According to his beloved wife Aisha, he:

“...spoke in such a way that if one were to count his words, they could be counted.” (Al-Bukhari)

The Messenger also, according to his companions, would repeat his words thrice. The words that he spoke and the lessons he delivered were unambiguous, which helped students of Islam excel at perfecting their knowledge and improving their behaviour. The perfection of Prophet Muhammad’s speech was intentional as a means to really drive the message home to each one of his students through repetition, which is an excellent learning tool.

It is narrated from Jabir ibn Abdullah that the Prophet (PBUH) said: *“God did not send me to make things hard for people in the hope that they would make mistakes, rather He sent me to teach (as a teacher) and make things easy.” (Muslim 1478).*

Mu'awiyah ibn Al-Hakam said:

“By God I have never seen a better teacher or better teaching before or since; he (the Prophet PBUH) did not rebuke me, hit me or revile me.” (Muslim 537).

In another narration he said:

“And I have never seen any teacher gentler than the Messenger of God (PBUH).” (Abu Dawud 931).

The Prophet would utilise the technique of repetition to not only intrigue but to make memorisation easy for his students. Sometimes he would repeat something three times. One example is the Hadith (saying of Muhammed) narrated by Abu Shuraih: “The Prophet said,

‘By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!’ It was said [by one individual listening], “Who is that, O Allah’s Apostle?” He (peace be upon him) said, “That person whose neighbour does not feel safe from his evil.”

Another technique that he would often utilize effectively was asking a question to pique the interest and curiosity of the listeners. An example is when the Prophet asked his companions, *“What would be the situation of someone who has a river at his door and every day, five times a day, he comes out and he takes a bath in that river? At the end of the day would he have any dirt on himself?”* They responded, *“There would be no dirt on him, O Messenger.”* Then the

Prophet said, “Similarly there are the five prayers cleansing the person in this way”

In the above Hadith, the Prophet not only used a question to bring the listener’s mind to attentiveness, he also used an analogy — making a similarity between the five daily prayers as a cleansing of heart and soul to the river that cleanses the body.

Just as the Prophet used analogy to illustrate a point verbally, he also used drawing or illustration to make a point graphically. Once the Prophet drew a straight line through the sand and then drew lines to the right and lines to the left of the first line. Then while the people were looking intently at the drawing, he recited the verse of the Quran:

“And verily, this is My Straight Path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away from His Path” (Qur’an 6:153).

In other instances he illustrated his point using his hands. When he said,

“I and the one who takes care of the orphans are in paradise, like this” (Bukhari). As he was speaking, he interlaced his fingers”.

Using daily living experiences as opportunity to instruct, the Prophet, pbuh, once was travelling with some companions and when it was time to prepare food, he asked them to slaughter a sheep. One man

said he would do that, another said he would skin it, and a third said he would cook it. Then the Messenger of God said,

“I will collect wood for the fire.” They said, “No, we will do that work for you.” The Prophet answered, “I know that you can do it for me, but I hate to be privileged. God hates to see a servant of his privileged above others.” And the Prophet went and collected firewood (Khulasat-As-Siyar).”

As is clearly evident from above examples the method of teaching was interactive and informal yet very focused and practical. The Prophet at times would redirect a question to a topic that is more relevant and instructive. Once a Bedouin asked the Prophet, peace be upon him,

“When is the hour?” [the Day of Judgment]. The Prophet said,

“What have you prepared for that final hour?” The Bedouin said, “I haven’t prepared a lot of prayers and I haven’t prepared a lot of charity but I am preparing one thing – my love for God and His messenger.” The Prophet (pbuh) said, “You will be with who you love.”

Muhummed pbuh raised the level of seeking knowledge to the highest of levels by saying:

“He who goes forth in search of knowledge is in the path of God till he returns. He pbuh also said, “The seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim (man and woman)”

In a tradition recorded by Tirmidhi, Muhammed pbuh said:

“The angels in heaven, fish in the water and ants in their dwellings pray for the well-being of a seeker of knowledge”

There is another saying of the Prophet which explains that:

“Those who learn virtues and teach it to others are the best among humankind” (Al-Bayhaqi)

The mission of Muhammed pbuh has been introduced in the Quran at more than one place as an Instructor of the Book and giver of wisdom. The Quran declares:

“He it is who has raised among the unlettered people a Messenger from among themselves who recites to them His signs and purifies them, and to instruct them in the Book and wisdom.” (62:2)

Similarly, on another occasion the Prophet pbuh presented himself before the people saying, *“I have been sent only as a teacher.”*

Also important is the fact that the first word revealed in the form of the Quran was ‘Iqra’ (96:1), which means to read or learn. The fourth verse of the first revelation forming part of the chapter Al-Qalam describes:

“God has taught man by the pen.” (96:4)

There are more than 1500 derivatives and synonyms of the word Ilm, that is, knowledge. It is simply astonishing how the revelation of the

Quran in this, almost illiterate, nation of Arabia set off such a wave of receiving and imparting education, which can rightly be called a “knowledge explosion”. This is a fact that has been acknowledged by historians. For instance, Indian historian, T. Rama Rao begins his biography of the Prophet of Islam with these words:

“When he appeared, Arabia was a desert—a nothing. Out of nothing of the desert a new world was fashioned by the mighty spirit of Muhammad. A new life, a new culture, a new civilization, a new kingdom, which extended from Morocco to India and influenced the thought and life of three continents—Asia, Africa and Europe” (Life of Muhammad).

When Muhammed pbuh was raised as the Messenger of God in the seventh century CE not more than 150 people all over Arabia knew how to read and write. They made the maximum use of their ability to memorise, preserving all their literary heritage in their memory.

There is no trace or evidence of any systematic or organised activity of learning or teaching in the society before the revelation of the Quran. But soon after the revelation of the Quran, the trend of receiving education set in, and everyone who accepted Islam learnt the Quran and the education revolution was set in motion.

This obviously did not happen overnight but took the exemplary teaching skills and methodologies used by Prophet Muhammed pbuh to transform an illiterate and crude social fabric into a civilised and cultured one providing it the finesse of maturity and the broadest

outlook based on tolerance and acceptance of new ideas and principles that ultimately lead to a real explosion of learning, research and knowledge. The golden age of Muslim civilisation coincided with the dark ages of the western world and the transfer of the knowledge explosion from Arabia to Europe was primarily responsible for the renaissance seen in Europe after its dark ages.

Teaching aspect of Muhammed's mission was the most dominant theme in all his dealings to the extent that even in the battlefield he did not miss the opportunity to get people educated through prisoners of war:

“At the Battle of Badr 70 people from the enemy camp were taken prisoners. However, most of the Makkans being businessmen, knew how to read and write. But the Madinans were mostly farmers, who did not know how to read or write. Owing to the importance of education in Islam the Prophet pbuh decided that those prisoners of war who would teach 10 Muslim children would secure their freedom. This was the first proper school in Islam established by the Prophet himself” (Tabaqat, Ibn Sad).

Women were not kept away from these activities. Starting with the Prophet's own household, Muslim families provided equal opportunities to the female members of the family to learn, to grow and play a constructive role in the progress and development of society at large. A large number of learned women have found mention in history as authorities on various Islamic sciences such as hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, Seerah of the Prophet, commentary on

the Quran, etc. The Prophet's own wife, Aishah, imparted the knowledge and wisdom she received from the first educator, for almost half a century. She has narrated more than two thousand traditions of the Prophet, and according to the Muslim jurists, these are the source of two thirds of Islamic laws relating to social, political and cultural issues.

Biographers such as Ibn Khallikan (author of Waqeyatul Ayan), Ibn Sa'd (author of Tabaqat), Khatib Bhagdadi (author of Taarikh Baghdad) and Al-Miqrizi (author of al-Khutul wal-Athar) have mentioned the names of thousands of women and their outstanding contribution in the field of education and development in the Muslim world. Noteworthy among them, for instance, are the two sisters of Al-Fahri of Morocco, Fatimah and Maryam, the daughters of Muhammad ibn Abdullah, who founded the Qayrawan University and the Andalus University in the historical city of Fas in 245 A.H (9th Century).

The Quran, in fact, has given a new outlook, a new perspective or paradigm as coined by Thomas Kahn (The Structure of Scientific Revolution, 1955). According to this Quranic paradigm, man's most important activity being intellectual contemplation or reflection, he was not supposed to blindly follow any idea or notion just because it was attributed to his ancestors or some other authority. He had to ponder on it critically and realistically. That is why we find that the Quran is replete with hundreds of inspirational and motivational verses that invite man to reflect on the wonderful creatures of God.

For example:

“In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for people with intelligence, those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying) “Our Lord! You have not created all this in vain (without purpose), Glory be to You. (3:190-91, 7:176, 10:24,13:3, 16:11).

This, we can say, was the intellectual seed, which is called, in the academic circles, the spirit of enquiry. According to Toynbee and other world historians, this spirit of enquiry was the first and foremost prerequisite for the inauguration of the scientific era and the elimination of a superstitious outlook on nature and life. So it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is the Quran that has laid down the foundation of modern science. On the other hand, the Prophet himself has dealt with day-to-day problems of life in accordance with this realistic approach taught by the Quran.

Consequently the same realistic approach became an integral part of the frame of mind of his companions. They all became curious, inquisitive and realistic in all matters of life. For example; once the Prophet passed by an oasis where he found the farmers, who were date planters at work. When he asked what they were doing, he was told that they were grafting the clusters of dates in order to produce a better yield. The Prophet expressed his disapproval of this process. Knowing this, the farmers immediately stopped it. But later on the Prophet was told that due to lack of proper grafting the yield had

been very low as compared to the previous years. On hearing this, the Prophet pbuh replied.

“You know your worldly matters better.” (Sahih Bukhari) In other words, experiment and observation should be the final criteria in such worldly matters.

The invitation of the Quran to inquiry coupled with the encouragement of the Prophet pbuh to engage in direct observation and reflection led Muslims to study everything objectively. They started eagerly learning from everyone irrespective of his or her religious and cultural origins. This trend of insatiable curiosity and open mindedness motivated the succeeding generations during the Umayyad and Abbasid times to enthusiastically learn and translate the cultural legacy of other nations, particularly the Persian, Greek and Roman. Abu Jafar Mansur (754-775) established Bayt al Hikmah (the House of Wisdom) where highly paid multilingual scholars were appointed to translate into Arabic books on Persian literature, Greek philosophy, medicine, and other sciences available in those times in different parts of the world.

This was an actualisation of the Prophet’s inspiring words:

“Wisdom is a believer’s own property, he should try to take it wherever he finds it”

Of the Abbasid Caliphs, Harun Ar-Rashid, AlMamun and Mutadid Billah, are reported to have invited doctors, philosophers, and learned scholars from various parts of the world to settle in Muslim

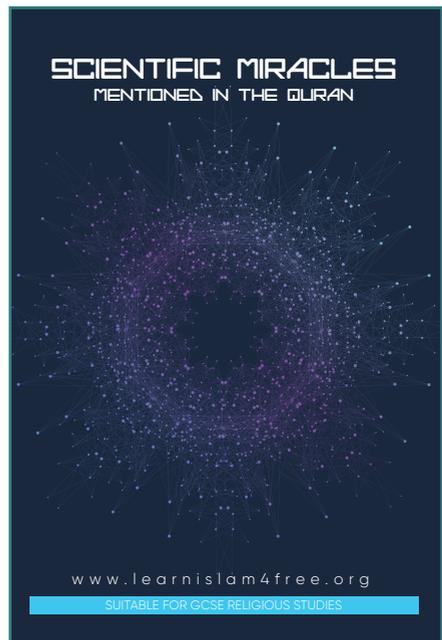
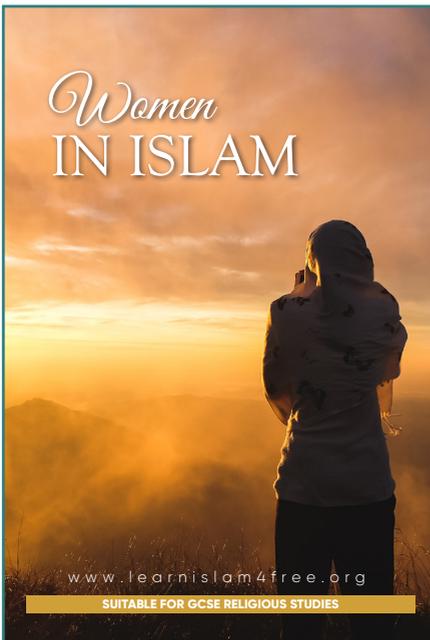
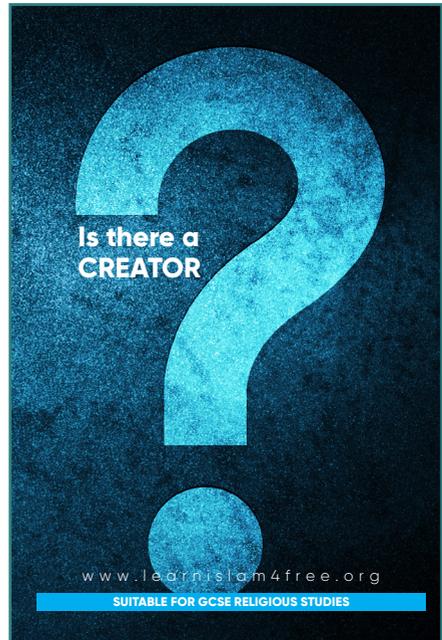
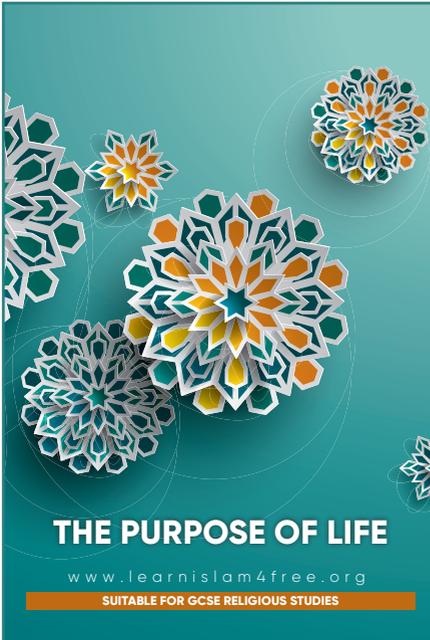
cities and help in these activities. They even bought some books by paying for them in gold equivalent to their weight.

The Quran accorded such esteem to knowledge and understanding that it declared:

“It is the men of knowledge who can truly realise God.” (35:28)

Muhummed’s teaching skills continue to bear fruit even today through the ever evolving research and knowledge

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