

**PROPHET MUHAMMAD:
THE EXEMPLARY TEACHER**

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Introduction

Ever before the coming of Prophet Muhammad, messengers have been sent to different nations and tribes, but the people had wrongly thought that the messengers had great supernatural powers; that they had some say in the reward and punishment of the people on the Day of judgment; that they had power to change the fate and destinies of people; that they were masters of good and evil and had power to benefit or harm people; that all the forces in nature were under their control and they had knowledge of the unseen.

These and similar ideas were very common among people. The believers therefore, demanded strange things from the Holy Prophet (SAW): "They say: We shall not believe in you until you call a spring to gush forth for us from the earth; or (until) you have a garden of date trees and vines, and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst, carrying abundant water or you cause the sky to fall in pieces, as you say will happen before us face to face; or you have a house adorned with gold or you mount a ladder right into the skies. No, we shall never believe in your mounting until you send down to us a book that we could read, Say: "Glory to my Lord! Am I anything but a man, a messenger.

From the foregoing it is categorically clear that the messengers including Muhammad only provided guidance to the people and were not responsible for their actions. Allāh says:

Verily, We revealed the Book to you in Truth, (for instructing) mankind. He, then, that receives guidance benefits his own souls, but he that strays injures his own soul. Nor are you set over them to dispose of their affairs

In another chapter Allāh says "your duty is to make (the message) reach them, it is our part to call them to account.

It is therefore the task of disseminating the message which made him (Muhammad) a great teacher of all time. The way and manner by which this work was performed is thus the crux of this chapter, the qualities which he had over and above other messengers With similar task which qualified him to be exceptional will be

considered and recommendations will be made on how the present and future teachers can benefit from his wealth of experience as a teacher.

The Man Muhammad

Muhammad (SAW) was born in Makkah, Arabia (now called Saudi Arabia) on Monday 12th Rabi' al-Awwal (2nd August 570 C.E.) in the noble family of the Quraish of the famous tribe of Banu Hashim." He was born at a time when the message of the previous messengers of God was completely lost and mankind was groping its way through the darkness of ignorance. The Arab had forgotten the religion of their true fore fathers, (Ibrahim and Isma'il). The teachings of Moses and Jesus were practically lost by

their followers. They had changed and corrupted the teachings of God's messengers and mixed other ideas with them. The doctrine of monotheism had lost its practical significance and implications both for the Jews and the Christians, while the Arabs were completely engulfed in the worship of idols and polytheism. The last messenger of God was born when the whole world had forgotten the message of the Creator and was lost in the wilderness of polytheism.

Muhammad (SAW) was therefore born and raised as a messenger of God and was sent for the guidance of mankind. All the messengers of God who came before him were human beings. They lived ordinary lives like ordinary people. They married, had children, experienced suffering and pain and endured hardships for the pleasure of God. Muhammad (SAW) was no exception. He was a man like all other messengers; he went through hardship and endured suffering and pain in the cause of Islam merely for the pleasure of God.

The Mission of Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad was sent to establish on earth the rule of God and a system both good and just so that people could live in peace and harmony. He tried all he could to bring the people under the law of God and left no stone unturned to establish such a system. To accomplish this, first, he had to do a lot of cleaning up in order to make the people ready and capable of establishing such a noble system. He had to educate and purify them, explain and clarify the laws of God to them and prepare them for the tremendous task of establishing a good, just and egalitarian society. The Holy Prophet (SAW) was given this assignment in various capacities which he performed to his utmost ability and power under the direction and guidance of the Divine

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Revelation. The one we are particular about in this chapter, however, is his role as an exemplary teacher.

Qualities of a Good Teacher

Before going ahead to look at Muhammad (SAW) as a qualitative and exemplary teacher, it is expedient for one to appraise those qualities enumerated by modern educationists and educators of our time as expected of any good teacher. Qualities such as sympathy and kindness, helpfulness, patience, a pleasing personal appearance and manner, emotional stability and self control are some of the sterling qualities enumerated by Ibrahim, Alhassan and Opobiya in their work titled Curriculum Development: A practical Approach Other qualities highlighted by the same authors include fairness and impartiality, a sense of humor, honesty, enthusiasm, creativeness and resourcefulness.

In his own view, Ogunsaju explained that a good teacher is someone who, apart from his ability to transfer or effectively impart knowledge on his learner, is also able to perform the following important administrative functions: planning, organizing, guiding and directing, motivating, resourcing, making decisions, coordinating and evaluating Hence, to say that the Prophet is an embodiment of all the above traits is going to be an understatement. Allāh who sent him described him better when He says:

Certainly, you have in the Messenger of Allāh an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allāh and the Last day, and remembers Allāh much.

Muhammad (SAW) as a Teacher

The soft landing for Muhammad (SAW) to be a teacher was prepared by Prophet Ibrahim when he prayed to God to raise a messenger among the descendants of Isma'il to educate and purify them "And remember Ibrahim and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House with this prayer: 'Our Lord, send amongst them a messenger of their own, who shall rehearse your signs to them and instruct them in scripture and wisdom and purify them. Thus in the following verse, it is observed that the prayer of Prophet Ibrahim was accepted and a messenger was raised among the Arabs to educate and purify them:

- (i) "A similar favor you have already received in that we have sent among you a messenger of your own, rehearsing to you our signs and purifying you, and instructing you in scripture and wisdom and in new knowledge".

Commented [1]:

- (ii) It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error.
- (iii) God did confer a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a messenger from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the signs of God purifying them, and instructing them in scripture and wisdom, while before that they had been in manifest error".

The verses quoted above establish clearly the following three objectives of the Holy Prophet' mission:

- (a) That he explains God's commandments and signs and their rational interpretation to the people.
- (b) That he teaches them the Book i.e. the Qur'an and the wisdom to understand the purpose and object of the teaching of the Book. Wisdom also refers to the ability and power of a person to arrive at the right decision according to the law of God.
- (c) That he purifies their hearts, actions and morals of wrong and evil ideas, and develops good qualities, good morals and right actions in them.

Muhammad's contributions to the field of knowledge and education are not less than to other fields of human activity. He immensely enriched the people among whom he was born with his Divine and encyclopedic wealth of knowledge and through them the whole of mankind. He kindled the light of knowledge and reason in the midst of the Arabian desert and it gradually engulfed the entire world with its glare, destroying all shadows of ignorance and superstition. It seems strange and incredible that Muhammad, who himself was untutored and unlettered, gave learning and knowledge to his people who later on became the educators of the world." He produced scholars and philosophers from the pagans and made them the leaders of the world. This is why he is acclaimed as a great educational leader. According to Gulick, the Qur'an was his only miracle, it being the revelation of an untutored mind and the first book in Arabic. That an educator could be illiterate might be the corollary to this miracle Muhammad was indeed an educator, the true director to guide humanity towards greater freedom and happiness.

The Nature and Extent of Muhammad's Teaching:

Prophet Muhammad asked people to forget their old ways and customs and invited them to the divine Guidance received from God and advised them to depend for all

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practical purposes on the Qur'an. " As Muhammad's education contains essential parts of the previous teachings, they were advised to follow the teachings and guidance of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an is the only right and sure guidance for all mankind because it contains the Truth, and nothing but the Truth. Its truth and guidance are based on knowledge and reality from God, and not conjecture, speculation or human philosophy. This knowledge leads man straight to the right way and men of learning and wisdom recognized its truth. "Whoever believes in the Qur'an and its teaching must also believe in the hereafter, and Islam makes this belief the bedrock of its plan for the moral purification of man and his whole way of life.

Thus, the concept and belief that man's fundamental role on the earth is that God is the cornerstone of Islamic culture. And in order to fulfil this function as such, it is necessary that he should acquire the Right and the True knowledge of God, the only sovereign Lord.

He should make efforts to fashion his life and whole way of living in accordance with the guidance and teachings of His prophet. It is therefore obligatory on him to have a strong belief in the five cardinal principles of the Islamic faith because they fully meet the above requirements and help to establish and shape the culture of Islam on those very lines drawn for it by the Islamic concepts of life and of its purpose. No other creed can fulfil the purpose of providing the foundation for such a culture.

The culture treats man as a member of the Universal human race and establishes a universal brotherhood which any member of the human race may join, irrespective of his colour, race or tongue. But it applies strict discipline and firm control over its followers in order to obtain adherence to the Divine law, but without any coercion, by mere personal self-discipline. From the world point of view, the aim of the Islamic culture is to establish a highly moral, just and righteous society. Undoubtedly, it is faith which provides the firm foundation for the building of Islamic culture and also protects it from external forces. Faith, thus, is the very essence, the life and soul of the entire structure of Islamic culture.

And the only effective and practical method of strengthening faith is the acquisition of knowledge. It is knowledge that gives clear guidance as to what is right and virtuous and what is wrong and evil. A believer can really gain goodness and excellence and win the pleasure of God by knowing and doing good in accordance with His guidance; and avoid evil and the displeasure of God by knowing and

abstaining from what He has forbidden. That is why the Qur'an says that if you know not, then ask those who have got knowledge of the Book, " and the Prophet said that one learned man is harder on the devil than a thousand ignorant worshippers.

Muhammad's Contribution to Various Fields of Modern Human Learning or Endeavours

Muhammad's teaching held a tremendous effect and influence on all human endeavours in diverse ways. It stimulated learning and encouraged research in all fields of human activity by banishing prejudice and superstition from the human mind and bringing man to follow the truth and investigate it with a free mind. It emphasized that this approach is the right one and will eventually lead to intellectual progress, opening new horizons for him for the benefit of mankind. It is Muhammad's greatest contribution as an educator, not yet fully realized by the western materialists, that there is really no conflict between science and religion. Likewise through the Qur'an and the Hadith, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had been found to be instrumental to the study of new courses in our educational sector at all levels. AS it is not possible to cite all examples of his contributions in this chapter, few examples will suffice as considered below.

1. Geography

Muhammad was not a geographer, nor was geography his aim, but the Divine Book which he was given is so comprehensive and vast in knowledge that it stimulated man's curiosity, effort and research in all fields of study. Not only the earth but the whole universe became a subject of study for him. Invigorated and inspired by the Qur'anic teaching, the Muslim went ahead to solve the mysteries of nature and space which was a very obvious field of study. The Qur'an repeatedly invites man to travel round the earth and see the fate of those who disobeyed Gods commandments," then the pilgrimage to the Holy city of Makkah also stimulated geographical research." Another factor which provided a further stimulus to geographical study was the realization on the part of Muslims that they were the rightful inheritors of the earth and all its wealth was properly exploited and utilized.

2. Agriculture and Irrigation

The study of the Qur'an also provides stimulus to human efforts towards the development of agriculture and irrigation for the benefit of mankind. The Islamic philosophy of worship or Ibadah, that every effort and activity of man which is undertaken in the obedience of God and His commandment is a

virtuous deed, encouraged research in every field, including agriculture and irrigation. As agriculture was the basic activity, it received a tremendous boost from Qur'anic study.

3. **Cosmology**

Cosmology is the starting point of all Islamic sciences and it deals with the existence of God, Who is one, both transcendent and immanent. "There is no deity but one God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God". All the cosmos was created by one God and, in spite of its vastness and hierarchic structure, reflects the unity of God. This clearly shows that God is the controlling authority, the central point in the cosmos, and the latter "is directly related to the principles of the Islamic Revelation and to the metaphysics which issues forth from the esoteric message of the Qur'an and inner teachings of the Prophet which are its complement" "The study of the cosmos ultimately brings man back to where he started: the knowledge of God's unity and the whole universe under His direct command and control and that He is fully aware of what is happening on the earth and in the heavens. " From the study of the Qur'an sprang many sciences (like Geology, Mineralogy, Botany, Zoology, Medicine, Engineering, Mathematics Astronomy, Physics, evolution of the embryo and its development etc.) which will not be discussed in this chapter) depicting and revealing diverse aspects of the cosmos but these sciences were completely united through the perception of a Universe created, controlled and directed by God. As a result of this, "in all their diverse forms, Islamic cosmology and Cosmography have served as background, matrix and principle for the various Islamic sciences from geography to alchemy....

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Muhammad's contribution to knowledge and science is immense and without it this world would have been quite different practically in the shadow of darkness and ignorance. He taught man to follow truth wherever it may lead, and to look and investigate with a free and unprejudiced mind. Then he also broadened his outlook and made him world-embracing so that he could use his knowledge for the benefit of mankind. Above all, he guided mankind toward greater freedom and happiness. A strong case can be made for the belief that wherever Islam penetrated, it left in its wake a more advance, enriched civilization.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that the Prophet through his contribution to knowledge is no doubt exemplary. It is now left for us to emulate him. There is a lesson in this chapter for the teacher as well as for the

student as the Qur'an has pointed out that there is in the Prophet an excellent example for him who hopes in Allāh and the Last day and remember Allāh much. All the virtues in him which has made it possible for him to transform the world despite his status as an unlettered man should be emulated by everybody especially the would-be teachers, teachers and students.