**The Educational Atmosphere**



62.2. He it is Who has sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger of their own, reciting to them His Revelations, and purifying them (of false beliefs and doctrines, and sins, and all kinds of uncleanness), and instructing them in the Book and the Wisdom, whereas before that they were indeed lost in obvious error.(1)



39.9. Is he who worships God devoutly in the watches of the night, prostrating and standing, who fears the Hereafter and hopes for the mercy of his Lord (to be likened to that other)? Say: "Are they ever equal, those who know and those who do not know?" Only the people of discernment will reflect (on the distinction between knowledge and ignorance, and obedience to God and disobedience,) and be mindful.(2)



4.162. But those of them firmly rooted in Knowledge, and the (true) believers, believe in what has been sent down to you (O Messenger), and what was sent down before you; and especially those who do the Prayer in conformity with all its conditions, and those who pay the Prescribed Purifying Alms, and the believers in God and the Last Day (as both must be believed in): to them will We will grant a tremendous reward.(3)



3.18. God (Himself) testifies that there surely is no deity but He, and so do the angels and those of knowledge, being firm in upholding truth and uprightness: (these all testify that) there is no deity but He, the All-Glorious with irresistible might, the All-Wise.(4)

**HADITH**

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "The seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim." (5)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “One who treads a path in search of knowledge has his path to Paradise made easy by God…” (6)

**Consider the following verse:**

It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger of their own, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom, although they had been, before, in manifest error. (62:2)

Some of these words are very interesting. God is mentioned in the third person, because the ignorant, primitive, and savage Arabs did not know Him. As there was no “He” in their minds, God first emphasizes the darkness of their nature, their great distance from Him, and indicates that they cannot be addressed directly by Him.

Then God calls them unlettered. They were not all illiterate, but they had no knowledge of God and the Messenger. God, by His infinite Power, sent to this trifling community a Messenger with the greatest will-power, the most sublime nature, the deepest spirituality, and the highest morality, by means of whom He would instruct them in how to become geniuses who would one day govern humanity.

The word among shows that the Messenger was one of them, but only in the sense of being unlettered. Being chosen by God, he could not possibly belong to the Age of Ignorance (pre-Islamic Arabia). However, he had to be unlettered so that God would teach him what he needed to know. God would remove him from his people, educate him, and make him a teacher for all unlettered people.

The phrases to recite to them His signs and to purify them point out that He teaches them about the meanings of **the Quran** and of creation in a gradual manner, and informs them how to become perfect human beings by striving for spiritual perfection. He guides them to higher ranks by explaining the Qur’an and the universe to them, and showing them in minute detail how to lead a balanced and exemplary life in every sphere of activity.

The sentence although they had been, before, in manifest error indicates that God would purify and educate them even though they had gone astray. He did all of this through an unlettered Messenger and by teaching them the Qur’an. Throughout history and even today, this Book has met the needs of countless brilliant scientists, scholars, and saints.

After the Prophet, humanity saw his flag waving everywhere for centuries. Those who follow him, both now and in the past, reach the highest spiritual realms on wings of sainthood, piety, righteousness, knowledge, and science. Those who climbed the steps of good conduct and spirituality, and knowledge and science, both now and in the past, saw in each step the “footprints” of Prophet Muhammad and greet him with “God bless you.” They will do the same again in the near future. All so-called original ideas will disappear one by one, like candles blown out, leaving only one “sun”—the Qur’an—that will never set. Its flag will be the only one waving on the horizon, and every generation will rush to it, breaking the chains around their necks.

**Essentials of a Good Education**

A real educator must have several virtues, among them the following:

First: Give due importance to all aspects of a person’s mind, spirit, and self, and to raise each to its proper perfection. The Qur’an mentions the evil-commanding self that drags people, like beasts with ropes around their necks, wherever it wants to go, and goads them to obey their bodily desires. In effect, the evil-commanding self wants people to ignore their God-given ability to elevate their feelings, thoughts, and spirits.

The Qur’an quotes the Prophet Joseph as saying: Surely the self commands evil, unless my Master has mercy (12:53). Commanding evil is inherent in the self’s nature. However, through worship and discipline, the self can be raised to higher ranks, to a position where it accuses itself for its evils and shortcomings (75:2), and then still higher where God addresses it: O self at peace! Return unto your Master, well-pleased, well-pleasing (89:27-28).

Higher than the self at peace (at rest and contented) is the self perfectly purified. Those who rise to this degree of attainment are the nearest to God. When you look at them you remember God, for they are like polished mirrors in which all of His attributes are reflected. The Companions’ desire to follow the training provided by Prophet Muhammad enabled almost all of them to reach this degree of moral and spiritual perfection; millions of people have followed—and continue to follow—their example.

Second: An education system is judged by its universality, comprehensiveness, and quality of its students. His students were ready to convey his Message throughout the world. The Message they conveyed, being universal in nature and valid for all times and places, found a ready acceptance among people of different races, religious background, intellectual levels, and age differences from modern-day Morocco and Spain to the Philippines, from the Russian steppes to the heart of Africa. Its principles remain valid. Despite numerous upheavals and changes, as well as social, economic, intellectual, scientific, and technological revolutions, his system remains the most unique and original, so much so that it is the hope of the future of humanity.

Third: An education system is judged by its ability to change its students. The example of smoking was mentioned earlier, as was that of how Islam and the Prophet’s spread of it transformed the tribes of Arabia into their exact opposite within the space of just two or three decades. To those who deny or question his **Prophethood**, we challenge them to go anywhere in the world and accomplish, over the course of 100 years, even one-hundredth of what he accomplished in the deserts of Arabia 1,400 years ago. Let them take all of the experts they can gather, and then we will wait to see their results.

When **Prophet Muhammad** was conveying the Message, Arabia was isolated from its neighbors by vast deserts and rightfully could be considered one of the most backward areas of the world in terms of its cultural, intellectual, and moral life. The Hijaz, where the Prophet was born, had experienced no social evolution and had attained no intellectual development worthy of mention. Dominated by superstitions, barbarous and violent customs, and degraded moral standards, people lived in savagery. They drank wine, gambled, and indulged in what even average societies consider immoral sexual activities. Prostitutes advertised their services by hanging a flag on the doors of their houses.

It was a land without law and a government. Might was right, as in many parts of the world today, and looting, arson, and murder were commonplace. Any trivial incident could provoke intertribal feuding, which sometimes developed into peninsula-wide wars.

These were the people **Prophet Muhammad** appeared among. With the Message he relayed from God and his way of preaching it, he eradicated barbarism and savagery, adorned Arabia’s wild and unyielding peoples with all praiseworthy virtues, and made them teachers of the world. His domination was not physical or military; rather, he conquered and subjugated them by becoming the beloved of their hearts, the teacher of their minds, the trainer of their souls, and the ruler of their spirits. He eradicated their evil qualities, and implanted and inculcated in his followers’ hearts exalted qualities in such a way that they became second nature to all of his followers.

But this transformation was not limited only to the people of his own time and place, for this process continues even today wherever his Message spreads. It was not only quickly accepted in Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Persia, Egypt, Northern Africa, and Spain at its first outburst, but, with the exception of the now-vanished brilliant civilization of Islamic Spain, it has never lost its vantage ground. Since it first appeared, it has never stopped spreading.

Many world-renowned individuals have been raised in the school of Muhammad. Certainly, we come across numerous great historical figures in other schools of education as well. God has honored humanity with great heroes, eminent statesmen, invincible commanders, inspired saints, and great scientists. However, most of them have not made a deep impression on more than one or two aspects of human life, for they confine themselves to those fields. But since Islam is a Divine way for all fields of life, a Divine system encompassing all aspects of life—”like a perfect work of architecture all of whose parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other, nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure,” according the Muhammad Asad, a Jewish convert—its students usually combine within themselves the spiritual and the rational, the intellectual and the material, the worldly with the other-worldly, the ideal with the real, and the scientific and the revealed (by God).

At its very outset, Islam abolished tribal conflicts and condemned racial and ethnic discrimination. The Prophet put the Qurayshi chiefs under Zayd’s command (an emancipated black slave), and innumerable scholars and scientists, commanders, and saints appeared among conquered peoples. Among them was Tariq ibn Ziyad, an emancipated Berber slave who conquered Spain with 90,000 valiant warriors and laid the foundations of one of the most splendid civilizations of world history. After this victory, he went to the palace where the defeated king’s treasury was kept. He said to himself:

Be careful, Tariq. Yesterday you were a slave with a chain around your neck. God emancipated you, and today you are a victorious commander. However, you will change tomorrow into flesh rotting under earth. Finally, a day will come when you will stand in the Presence of God.

The world and its pomp could not attract him, and he continued to live a very simple life. What kind of education could transform a slave into such a dignified and honorable person?

However, his conquest of Spain was not his real victory. This came when he stood before the treasury of the Spanish king and reminded himself that one day he would die and face God. As a result of this self-advice, he took none of the treasure for himself.

‘Uqba ibn Nafi’ was another great commander who conquered northern Africa and reached the Atlantic coast. There he stood and said: “O God, if this sea of darkness did not appear before me, I would convey Your Name, the source of light, to the remotest corners of the world.”

Before his conversion, ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas’ud took care of ‘Uqba ibn Abi Mu’ayt’s sheep. He was a weak, little man who everyone ignored. After becoming a Muslim, however, he was one of the most senior Companions. During his caliphate, ‘Umar sent him to Kufa as a teacher. In the scholarly climate he established there, the greatest figures of Islamic jurisprudence grew up, among them Alqama, Ibrahim al-Nakha’i, Hammad ibn Abi Sulayman, Sufyan al-Thawri, and especially Imam Abu Hanifa, the founder of the largest Islamic legal school.

Ikrima was the son of Abu Jahl, the harsh and inflexible leader of the Qurayshi unbelievers. Finally, after the Conquest of Makka, he converted to Islam. This event so changed him that he welcomed martyrdom 3 years later at the Battle of Yarmuk. His son, Amir, was martyred with him.

Hansa was one of the finest poetesses before Islam. Becoming a **Muslim**, she abandoned poetry because: “While we have the Qur’an, I cannot write poems.” She lost her four sons at the Battle of Qadisiyya. This great woman, who had lamented her brother’s death before the appearance of Islam with a great poem, did not lament this loss. Instead, she deepened her submission to God and said only: “O God, all praise be to You. You have bestowed on me while alive the possibility of offering you as martyrs my four sons that you gave me.”

The school of Prophet Muhammad also produced the most just rulers in history. Besides Abu Bakr, ‘Uthman, ‘Ali and many others who succeeded them, ‘Umar has been recognized in almost every age as one of the world’s most just and greatest statesmen. He used to say: “If a sheep falls from a bridge even on the river Tigris and dies, God will call me to account for it on the Day of Judgment.” When you compare the pagan ‘Umar to the Muslim ‘Umar, you easily see the sharp contrast between the two and understand how radically Islam changes people.(7)

# Ashab as-Suffa (The People of the Chamber)

The religion of Islam was now being taught to believers of all ages in the mosque of our Prophet. **The Messenger of Allah** would give daily lessons on the essentials of their religion to his Companions. Plus, there were about seventy young Muslims of limited means who lived in the courtyard of the masjid. These young believers had no home and no family. They would never leave our Prophet’s side, would memorize his teachings and they would learn about Islam to the best of their ability. The place where they stayed was called Suffa and they were known as Ashab as-Suffa, or the People of the Chamber. Those living in Suffa would pray, read the Qur’an and study their lessons during the nights. During the daytime, they would carry water and gather wood to sell, and they would buy food with the money they earned.

The most honorable people in the world were raised in Suffa, the first Islamic school of all time, under the tutelage of our Prophet. Our Prophet would always think of them before thinking of himself and would also advise his Companions to look after and take care of them. In Suffa, these young believers were being raised so that they could be sent out to the four corners of the Arabian Peninsula to fulfill their duties later on. Teachers of the Qur’an and hadith for tribes that had newly become Muslim were chosen from among this very special group. There were to be the successors of our Prophet in terms of knowledge. Abu Hurayra, who has narrated the most hadith from our Prophet, was also from the Ashab asSuffa.

**EDUCATION FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE**

**Introduction**

The main duty and purpose of human life is to seek understanding. The effort of doing so, known as education, is a perfecting process though which we earn, in the spiritual, intellectual, and physical dimensions of their beings, the rank appointed for us as the perfect pattern of creation. At birth, the outset of the earthly phase of our journey from the world of spirits to eternity, we are wholly impotent and needy. By contrast, most animals come into the world as if matured or perfected beforehand. Within a few hours or days or months, they learn everything necessary for their survival, as well as how to relate to their environment and with other creatures. For example, sparrows or bees acquire maturity and all the physical and social skills they need within about twenty days; we need twenty years or more to acquire a comparable level of maturity.

We are born helpless as well as ignorant of the laws of life and must cry out to get the help we need. After a year or so, we can stand on our feet and walk a little. When we are about fifteen, we are expected to have understood the difference between good and evil, the beneficial and the harmful. However, it will take us our whole lives to acquire intellectual and spiritual perfection. Our principal duty in life is to acquire perfection and purity in our thinking, conceptions, and belief. By fulfilling our duty of servanthood to the Creator, Nourisher, and Protector, and by penetrating the mystery of creation through our potentials and faculties, we seek to attain to the rank of true humanity and become worthy of a blissful, eternal life in another, exalted world.
Our humanity is directly proportional to our emotions’ purity. Although those who are full of bad feelings and whose souls are influenced by egoism look like human beings, whether they really are human is doubtful. Almost everyone can train their bodies, but few can educate their minds and feelings. The former training produces strong bodies, while the latter produces spiritual people.

**Our Innate Faculties and Education**

Since the time of Ibn Miskawayh, human faculties or “drives” have been dealt with in three categories: reason, anger, and lust. Reason encompasses all of our powers of conception, imagination, calculation, memory, learning, and so on. Anger covers our power of self-defense, which Islamic jurisprudence defines as that needed to defend our faith and religion, sanity, possessions, life and family, and other sacred values. Lust is the name for the driving force of our animal appetites: *Decked out for humanity is the passionate love of desires for the opposite sex and offspring; for hoarded treasures of gold and silver; for branded horses, cattle, and plantations; and for all kinds of worldly things (3:14).*

These drives are found in other creatures. However, whether in their desires, intelligence, or determination to defend life and territory, these drives are limited in all creatures but humanity. Each of us is uniquely endowed with free will and the consequent obligation to discipline our powers. This struggle for discipline determines our humanity. In combination with each other and with circumstances, our faculties often are expressed through jealousy, hatred, enmity, hypocrisy, and show. They also need to be disciplined.
We are not only composed of body and mind. Each of us has a spirit that needs satisfaction. Without this, we cannot find true happiness and perfection. Spiritual satisfaction is possible only through knowledge of God and belief in Him. Confined within the physical world, our own particular carnal self, time, and place can be experienced as a dungeon. We can escape it through belief and regular worship, and by refraining from extremes while using our faculties or powers. We must not seek to annul our drives, but to use our free will to contain and purify them, to channel and direct them toward virtue. For example, we are not expected to eliminate lust, but to satisfy it lawfully through reproduction. Happiness lies in confining our lust to the lawful bounds of decency and chastity, not in engaging in debauchery and dissipation.
Similarly, jealousy can be channeled into emulation free of rancor, which inspires us to emulate those who excel in goodness and good deeds. Applying the proper discipline to our reason results in the acquisition of knowledge, and ultimately of understanding or wisdom. Purifying and training anger leads to courage and forbearance. Disciplining our passion and desire develops our chastity.

If every virtue is thought of as the center of a circle, and any movement away from the center as a vice, the vice becomes greater as we move further away from the center. Every virtue therefore has innumerable vices, since there is only one center in a circle but an infinite number of points around it. It is irrelevant in which direction the deviation occurs, for deviation from the center, in whatever direction, is a vice.
There are two extremes related to each moral virtue: deficiency or excess. The two extremes connected with wisdom are stupidity and cunning. For courage they are cowardice and rashness, and for chastity they are lethargy and uncontrolled lust. So a person’s perfection, the ultimate purpose of our existence, lies in maintaining a condition of balance and moderation between the two extremes relating to every virtue. ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib is reported to have said:

“God has characterized angels by intellect without sexual desire, passion, and anger, and animals with anger and desire without intellect. He exalted humanity by bestowing upon them all of these qualities. Accordingly, if a person’s intellect dominates his or her desire and ferocity, he or she rises to a station above that of angels, because this station is attained by a human being in spite of the existence of obstacles that do not vex angels.

“Improving a community is possible only by elevating the young generations to the rank of humanity, not by obliterating the bad ones. Unless a seed composed of religion, tradition, and historical consciousness is germinated throughout the country, new evil elements will appear and grow in the place of each eradicated bad one.”

**The Real Meaning and Value of Education**

Education through learning and a commendable way of life is a sublime duty that manifests the Divine Name Rabb (Upbringer and Sustainer). By fulfilling it, we attain the rank of true humanity and become a beneficial element of society.

**Education** is vital for both societies and individuals. First, our humanity is directly proportional to our emotions’ purity. Although those who are full of bad feelings and whose souls are influenced by egoism look like human beings, whether they really are so is questionable. Almost anyone can be successful in physical training, but few can educate their minds and feelings. Second, improving a community is possible by elevating the coming generations to the rank of humanity, not by obliterating the bad ones. Unless the seeds of religion, traditional values, and historical consciousness germinate throughout the country, new bad elements will inevitably grow up in the place of every bad element that has been eradicated.
A nation’s future depends on its youth. Any people who want to secure their future should apply as much energy to raising their children as they devote to other issues. A nation that fails its youth, that abandons them to foreign cultural influences, jeopardizes their identity and is subject to cultural and political weakness.

The reasons for the vices observed in today’s generation, as well as the incompetence of some administrators and other nation-wide troubles, lie in the prevailing conditions and ruling elite of 25 years ago. Likewise, those who are charged with educating today’s young people will be responsible for the vices and virtues that will appear in another 25 years. Those who wish to predict a nation’s future can do so correctly by taking a full account of the education and upbringing given to its young people. “Real” life is possible only through knowledge. Thus, those who neglect learning and teaching should be counted as “dead” even though they are living, for we were created to learn and communicate to others what we have learned.

Right decisions depend on having a sound mind and being capable of sound thought. Science and knowledge illuminate and develop the mind. For this reason, a mind deprived of science and knowledge cannot reach right decisions, is always exposed to deception, and is subject to being misled.
We are only truly human if we learn, teach, and inspire others. It is difficult to regard those who are ignorant and without desire to learn as truly human. It is also questionable whether learned people who do not renew and reform themselves in order to set an example for others are truly human. Status and merit acquired through knowledge and science are higher and more lasting than those obtained through other means.

Given the great importance of learning and teaching, we must determine what is to be learned and taught, and when and how to do so. Although knowledge is a value in itself, the purpose of learning is to make knowledge a guide in life and illuminate the road to human betterment. Thus, any knowledge not appropriated for the self is a burden to the learner, and a science that does not direct one toward sublime goals is a deception.
But knowledge acquired for a right purpose is an inexhaustible source of blessings for the learner. Those who possess such a source are always sought by people, like a source of fresh water, and lead people to the good. Knowledge limited to empty theories and unabsorbed pieces of learning, which arouses suspicions in minds and darkens hearts, is a “heap of garbage” around which desperate and confused souls flounder. Therefore, science and knowledge should seek to uncover humanity’s nature and creation’s mysteries. Any knowledge, even “scientific,” is true only if it sheds light on the mysteries of human nature and the dark areas of existence.

**Family, School, and Environment**

People who want to guarantee their future cannot be indifferent how their children are being educated. **The family, school, environment**, and mass media should cooperate to ensure the desired result. Opposing tendencies among these vital institutions will subject young people to contradictory influences that will distract them and dissipate their energy. In particular, the mass media should contribute to young people’s education by following the education policy approved by the community. The school must be as perfect as possible with respect to curriculum, its teachers’ scientific and moral standards of teachers, and its physical conditions. A family must provide the necessary warmth and quality of atmosphere in which the children are raised.
In the early centuries of Islam, minds, hearts, and souls strove to understand that which the Lord of the heavens and the Earth approves. Each conversation, discussion, correspondence, and event was directed to that end. As a result, whoever could do so imbibed the right values and spirit from the surrounding environment. It was as if everything was a teacher to prepare the individual’s mind and soul and develop his or her capacity to attain a high level in Islamic sciences. The first school in which we receive the necessary education to be perfected is the home.

The home is vital to raising of a healthy generation and ensuring a healthy social system or structure. This responsibility continues throughout life. The impressions we receive from our family cannot be deleted later in life. Furthermore, the family’s control over the child at home, with respect to other siblings and toys, continues at school, with respect to the child’s friends, books, and places visited. Parents must feed their children’s minds with knowledge and science before their minds become engaged in useless things, for souls without truth and knowledge are fields in which evil thoughts are cultivated and grown.

Children can receive a good education at home only if there is a healthy family life. Thus marriage should be undertaken to form a healthy family life and so contribute to the permanence of one’s nation in particular, and of the human population in general. Peace, happiness, and security at home is the mutual accord between the spouses in thought, morals, and belief. Couples who decide to marry should know each other very well and consider purity of feelings, chastity, morality, and virtue rather than wealth and physical charm. Children’s mischief and impudence reflect the atmosphere in which they are being raised. A dysfunctional family life increasingly reflects upon the child’s spirit, and therefore upon society.
In the family, elders should treat those younger than them with compassion, and the young should show respect for their elders. Parents should love and respect each other, and treat their children with compassion and due consideration of their feelings. They must treat each child justly and not discriminate among them. If parents encourage their children to develop their abilities and be useful to themselves and the community, they have given the nation a strong new pillar. If they do not cultivate the proper feelings in their children, they release scorpions into the community.

**The School and the Teacher**

A school may be considered a laboratory that offers an elixir that can prevent or heal the ills of life. Those who have the knowledge and wisdom to prepare and administer it are the teachers.

**A school is a place of learning** about everything related to this life and the next. It can shed light on vital ideas and events, and enable its students to understand their natural and human environment. It also can quickly open the way to unveiling the meaning of things and events, thereby leading a student to wholeness of thought and contemplation. In essence, a school is a kind of place of worship whose “holy people” are teachers.
Real teachers sow the pure seed and preserve it. They occupy themselves with what is good and wholesome, and lead and guide the children in life and whatever events they encounter. For a school to be a true institution of education, students first should be equipped with an ideal, a love of their language and how to use it most effectively, good morals, and perennial human values. Their social identity must be built on these foundations.
Education is different from teaching. Most people can teach, but only a very few can educate. Communities composed of individuals devoid of a sublime ideal, good manners, and human values are like rude individuals who have no loyalty in friendship or consistency in enmity. Those who trust such people are always disappointed, and those who depend upon them are sooner or later left without support. The best way of equipping one with such values is a sound religious education.

A community’s survival depends on idealism and good morals, as well as on reaching the necessary level in scientific and technological progress. For this reason, trades and crafts should be taught beginning at least in the elementary level. A good school is not a building where only theoretical information is given, but an institution or a laboratory where students are prepared for life.

Patience is of great importance in education. **Educating people** is the most sacred, but also the most difficult, task in life. In addition to setting a good personal example, teachers should be patient enough to obtain the desired result. They should know their students very well, and address their intellects and their hearts, spirits, and feelings. The best way to educate people is to show a special concern for every individual, not forgetting that each individual is a different “world.”

School provides its pupils with the possibilities of continuous reading, and speaks even when it is silent. Because of this, although it seems to occupy only one phase of life, school actually dominates all times and events. For the rest of their lives, pupils re-enact what they learned at school and derive continuous influence therefrom. Teachers should know how to find a way to the student’s heart and leave indelible imprints upon his or her mind. They should test the information to be passed on to students by refining their own minds and the prisms of their hearts. A good lesson is one that does more than provide pupils with useful information or skills; it should elevate them into the presence of the unknown. This enables the students to acquire a penetrating vision into the reality of things, and to see each event as a sign of the unseen world.

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