

# **The Prophetic Standard: Incorporating the Instructional Methods of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Islamic Schools**

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## **Abstract:**

Within the plurality of interpretation of Islamic sources, the teacher has traditionally been a source of spiritual as well as moral direction first and a conveyor of academic knowledge second. A teacher, therefore, not only is a *muallim*, a 'transmitter of knowledge' but also a *murabbi*, a 'nurturer of souls'.

Thus far in the short history of Islamic schools we have an imbalance between the development of *what to teach* and *how to teach it*. In the push for curriculum programs and teaching resources we have implicitly assumed that teachers know what it means to be a Muslim educator. In this absence we have by and large accepted norms of imparting knowledge and definitions of the role of the teacher from existing popular practices in secular public schools. The workshop will, therefore, interactively highlight the founding principles of education in Islam as taught by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the teaching strategies he employed in varying circumstances.

## **Presenter Bio:**

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## **Disclaimer:**

The reader of this paper should recognize that I am not a scholar of Islamic sciences by any stretch of the imagination. My analysis of the Prophetic tradition is therefore limited to the time that I have spent studying with *shuyukh* and the wisdom that they have imparted. I ask the reader to then read this paper with my limitations in mind and forgive and correct my errors. My interest in this topic is solely from the perspective of an educator and someone who researches Islamic education for a living. This paper is an attempt to partially shift and partially strike a balance between the emphasis that Islamic schools place on the development of curriculum and teacher training programs. For feedback and suggested corrections to my paper please feel free to email at [nmemon@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:nmemon@oise.utoronto.ca).

## Introduction:

The focus of this paper will remain on the role of the teacher for the simple reason that far too much emphasis in the development of Islamic schools has been placed on what we are going to teach students (i.e. curriculum) and have in turn taken for granted the role and responsibility of the teacher.

I will argue that what makes an Islamic school “Islamic” is not the curriculum but the teacher. In humble disagreement to all those luminaries who have preceded me in this work, I contend that we must make a shift from curriculum development initiatives to teacher training initiatives in our Islamic schools if we are to raise their standards. Curriculum development was a more urgent requirement in the 1980s and 1990s when Islamic schools were first establishing themselves on the educational platform. A unique departure from public schooling curriculum had to be established for legitimacy. In turn, however, the role of the teacher was taken as a constant – that if the teacher is Muslim, they would by virtue know what it means to educate “Islamically.”

The result of taking the teaching method for granted has been an overemphasis on teaching content knowledge in the absence of nurturing *tarbiyah* (wholeness). The tradition of teaching and learning in Islam is a holistic tradition that unifies the mind-body-soul in the learning process. The purpose of learning is elevated beyond simply gaining marketable skills and a secular humanistic consciousness. In the Islamic tradition of learning, knowledge is sought to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of our vicegerency over the earth – to know Allah – and by virtue to serve humanity. Contributing to civil society through civic participation and working in an area of the labor force is a means to an end, but not an end in itself.

By adopting the structural forms and the methods of public schooling albeit while Islamizing the curriculum, we have by and large knowingly or unknowingly maintained the supremacy of the secular humanist agenda: become a relatively morally upright citizen while serving the aims of industrialization.

The questions that then arise are what exactly are these “structures” that we have adopted in Islamic schools and how are they impeding the growth of an “Islamic” education?

Structurally we have adopted the common practices in every field of popular education: **curriculum** (spiraling, outcomes-based, progressive/child-centered, market-based standardization), **classroom management** (individualization, detentions, homework, suspensions, zero-tolerance, expulsions,

group/individual work), **administration** (managerial accountability and cost effectiveness and efficiency), **assessment/evaluation** (high stakes, standardized exams, tests and quizzes), **adab of the teacher** (reflective of a work environment: curt, punitive, separation of public lives from private lives).

The question that arises as a result is whether the forms and inherent intent of many popular education trends are consistent with an Islamic conception of education? Specifically, for example, I am questioning whether giving a student a detention or a suspension for misbehavior, testing students consistently and constantly to determine understanding, or teaching students eight different subjects at once provides an education in the Islamic sense or espouses the values and virtues defined by Islam?

To answer these core questions a return to the most essential of sources is required. An analysis of the prophetic tradition and his ﷺ method of teaching (and learning) will provide a deeper understanding of what Islamic education means and a greater appreciation for the depth of Islam's educational pedagogy.

### **Defining "Islamic" Education:**

The essence of Islamic education is Islam. As simple and obvious as that statement sounds, Muslim educators need to recognize that we have been trying too hard to appropriate and find consistency between the language of popular education and that of Islam. Some will define *tarbiyah* as holistic education and others will define *ta'dib* as moral and ethical training in an attempt to define Islamic education as either a holistic education model or a form of character education. Granted these definitions have immense value but by limiting Islamic education to one or the other reduces the expansiveness of the Islamic teaching tradition. This reduction, however, is not a fault of the visionary who espouses *tarbiyah* or *ta'dib* as such but by the reader whose frame of educational reference may be limited and therefore equates an Islamic conception of holistic or character education by the models of popular education. What are often not recognized by the lay reader are the varying degrees by which a single term can be understood. Take for example the term holistic education. Current frameworks of holistic education are most often associated with the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner in Waldorf schools or theories of embodied learning from ancient Chinese traditions. The teaching methodology in holistic models of education, however are by and large grounded in seeing the teacher as facilitator of knowledge acquisition than the authoritative figure in a classroom. To appropriate this single conception of holistic education to Islamic education then is to 1. reduce the vastness of pedagogical technique in the Islamic tradition and 2. to not recognize the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student in Islam. That is not to say that Islamic education is not holistic rather it is vital

that we understand Islamic education as uniquely different and not rely on modern conceptions of education to justify the relevance of a particular method. In response then, I will attempt to analyze the definitions Islamic education in relation to instances in the Prophetic tradition to help envision what such practices may look like within educative moments.

If there is a single *hadith* that grounds the religion of Islam in a concise definition it is *Hadith Jibril*. From this then, if there is any prophetic tradition that grounds the definition of Islamic education it is inevitably the same *hadith*.<sup>1</sup>

*Hadith Jibril* is entitled so because it narrates the time when the Angel Jibril came to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to teach him his religion (and by virtue to teach us ours). The conversation that took place when the Angel came to the Prophet 80 days before he passed away is celebrated as the most concise summation of the religion of Islam and therefore is considered among the most important *hadith* in the *hadith* literature. Below is a transcription of the *hadith*.

### ***Hadith Jibril***

Also on the authority of 'Umar, *radiallahu 'anhu*, who said:

"While we were one day sitting with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, there appeared before us a man dressed in extremely white clothes and with very black hair. No traces of journeying were visible on him, and none of us knew him.

He sat down close by the Prophet ﷺ, rested his knee against his thighs, and said, O Muhammad! Inform me about Islam." Said the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, "Islam is that you should testify that there is no deity save Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger, that you should perform *salah* (ritual prayer), pay the *zakah*, fast during Ramadan, and perform Hajj (pilgrimage) to the House (the Ka'bah at Makkah), if you can find a way to it (or find the means for making the journey to it)." Said he (the man), "You have spoken truly."

We were astonished at his thus questioning him and telling him that he was right, but he went on to say, "Inform me about iman (faith)." He (the Messenger of Allah) answered, "It is that you believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and in the Last Day, and in fate (*qadar*), both in its good and in its evil aspects." He said, "You have spoken truly."

Then he (the man) said, "Inform me about Ihsan." He (the Messenger of Allah) answered, "It is that you should serve Allah as though you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him yet He sees you." He said, "Inform me about the Hour." He (the Messenger of Allah) said, "About that the one questioned knows no more than the questioner." So he said, "Well, inform me about the signs thereof (i.e. of its coming)." Said he, "They are that the slave-girl will give birth to her

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<sup>1</sup> This comment was made by Shaykh Hamza Yusuf in his lecture series entitled the Vision of Islam (CD2). The reliance on *Hadith Jibril*, however, is noted by many scholars as having essential guidance and insight for both the foundation of Islamic principles and if analyzed for the method in which it was imparted then for its pedagogical significance as well.

mistress, that you will see the barefooted ones, the naked, the destitute, the herdsmen of the sheep (competing with each other) in raising lofty buildings." Thereupon the man went off.

I waited a while, and then he (the Messenger of Allah) said, "O 'Umar, do you know who that questioner was?" I replied, "Allah and His Messenger know better." He said, "That was Jibril. He came to teach you your religion."<sup>2</sup>

[Muslim]

## Framing the Prophetic Standard

The relevance of this *hadith* to Islamic education is foundational and two-fold. Firstly the *hadith* illustrates how to teach and secondly the *hadith* provides the essential dimensions of an Islamic curriculum.

The first lesson of this *hadith* comes from reading between the lines and understanding the situation and setting in which the Angel Jibril presented itself. The fact that the Angel came in stark white clothing, looking fresh, and with no signs of travel was dumbfounding to the companions who were present because it was uncommon for them to not know of someone arriving and for those arriving to not have looked as though they had endured a journey. The significance of the clothing to teaching however, is immense and therefore not arbitrarily placed in the narration. Someone who teaches knowledge (sacred knowledge especially, although all forms of knowledge are sacred if approached with the intention to know the Magnificent and His Magnificence) must embody the esteemed nature of the content. Wearing the best and cleanest of clothes, being in a state of purity (*wudu*), and well rested then is essential as a teacher both out of respect for the knowledge that is to be imparted and out of respect to the student who has come to learn.<sup>2</sup>

The position of sitting is also vital to the Islamic tradition of teaching and learning. When the Angel Jibril approached the Prophet ﷺ and sat with knees touching and palms on his thighs, the *sahaba* initially were concerned about this person who approached with such familiarity. The posture, however, represents not necessarily the way that all learning must take place, but certainly illustrates

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the analysis/commentary of the *hadith* which I am providing is not my own. This commentary is my summary and compilation of notes taken of lectures by Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Shaykh Abdullah Adhami, Shaykh Abdullah Al-Kadi, Shaykh Mohammad Yaqoubi, Shaykh Jamal Zahabi, and others whose *durus* (lectures) I have attended in various parts of my life. The inspiration to summarize and reflect on the importance of this *hadith* in relation to my current research on Islamic schools only came, however, after listening to Shaykh Hamza Yusuf's lectures on the *Vision of Islam* available through Alhambra Productions.

the level of *adab* and intimacy that was part and parcel between the teacher and student.<sup>3</sup>

Further reflection on the context of when and how this historical moment unraveled, we can also gain an appreciation for teaching techniques that Jibril employed. When Jibril arrived and nestled itself close to the Prophet ﷺ and asked its questions, it did not do so with the intent of learning something it did not know, nor was it to confirm understanding in the individual being questioned, rather its intent in questioning was a teaching technique to both raise curiosity and to teach those around the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Along the lines of questioning, also notice that the *sahaba* (companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) did not rush to inquire who the questioner was when the Angel disappeared, but waiting patiently for the teacher (the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in this case) to elaborate. The commentary can continue with an analysis of Umar's *adab* in responding to the Prophet's ﷺ final question but suffice it to say that this *hadith* provides an example of the wisdom of teaching techniques that can be extrapolated from the prophetic tradition if we but reflected on our tradition more.

The second major educational relevance of this *hadith* is that it outlines not only the religion of Islam in its entirety as confirmed by the last line of the *hadith*, but for Islamic education, it outlines the aspects of the curriculum. Although curriculum is not the focus of this paper, a brief discussion of the aspects outlined by *Hadith* Jibril is relevant.

*Hadith* Jibril affirms the three aspects of the religion: Islam, Imaan, *Ihsaan*, and together with the concept of time the four dimensions of reality. Islam represents the expansiveness of our religion, the width. Imaan represents the vertical nature of our relationship back toward Allah, the breadth. *Ihsaan* is the aspect that teaches us the "how" in good conduct representing the depth of our religion. And all of these varying aspects play out in time, the fourth dimension where all of time is of two days: a day for you and a day against you. *Ihsaan* is what nurtures the human being to have gratitude for the days that are for us and the patience in the days that are against us.<sup>4</sup>

My personal contention from an educator's perspective is that Islamic schools have spent an imbalance of energy in developing and imparting the width (Islam) and breadth (imaan) over the aspects of the depth (*ihsaan*). Teaching about Islam through courses and curriculum on Islamic studies imparts the

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<sup>3</sup> Without a doubt this *hadith* deserves a much deeper commentary and analysis than what I have provided so those who are reading it please forgive my limited understanding of the depth of this and other Prophetic traditions quoted.

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph is a direct summary of Shaykh Hamza's analysis of *Hadith* Jibreel in the Vision of Islam

“what” of Islamic beliefs. Teachings about Imaan through ensuring students participate in daily congregational prayers and disciplined behavior in Islamic schools teaching about the “why” of Islamic faith principles. But when do Islamic schools teach about the “how” to perfect character through *Ihsaan*? Adopting conventional discipline of “zero tolerance,” detentions, and suspensions is not the Prophetic standard. Because *ihsaan* is an aspect of the religion that needs to be modeled and nurtured not simply taught as a curriculum outcome but taught as part of the ethos of the school culture. *Ihsaan* needs to be lived. And this is where the essential role of the teacher comes in.

The root of the word *Ihsaan* comes from the trilateral letters *ha-su-na* which means to make beautiful. Lexicographers could likely go into much more depth than that, but suffice it to say that the essence of *ihsaan* includes doing virtuous deeds, the acts of bringing virtue to the world and that’s why Islam places such a high regard for virtue because it makes the world beautiful – the essence of virtuous actions is that they fit properly into the world – in proper proportions.<sup>5</sup> That’s why at the essence of Islamic teaching is the concept *adab*, comportment, appropriate behavior, behavior done in proper proportions.

Nurturing Muslim children toward excellence in aspiration, comportment, and service is to impart a consciousness of being in the world as if you see God. Such a conception comes with the understanding that individual behavior will be self-managing and self-critical. An individual will adopt the idea that we all live in this world as guests of our Creator and therefore, act accordingly as we do when invited to a guests’ house. Such a consciousness can be taught from the lines in a book though; such an understanding must be nurtured, modeled, and exemplified by the teacher.

This is why, as noted at the beginning of the paper, Islamic schools must challenge the structures adopted from public schools of not considering the private lives of teachers when hiring or when developing relationships with students for example. Students cannot learn how to conduct themselves with beautiful character, if beautiful character is not modeled for them.

What I have extrapolated above is far from an exhaustive or even comprehensive list of the lessons that can be derived from this *hadith*. However, such an analysis does illustrate the method by which a deeper understanding of Islamic education can be achieved. By extracting lessons and deriving principles, an educator can then begin to compare contemporary issues in classroom practice against principles of education in Islam to arrive at unique ways at synthesizing the essence of Islamic education into current teaching practice.

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<sup>5</sup> Hamza Yusuf, Vision of Islam

## Instructional Strategies and the Prophetic Standard

Islamic school teachers, like all school teachers, always seek out the “relevance” of theoretical educational principles to their “every day practice.” I am always asked, regardless of whom I conduct teacher training sessions for, “Well, so... how can we implement this “stuff” you’ve taught in our classrooms/schools?” Granted the question is valid and that teachers have limited time to reflect on alternative pedagogical approaches, I have for the sake of interest and time, derived a few methods by which the wisdom of Prophetic educational techniques can be incorporated into Islamic schools.

Generalizations can be drawn from moments in the Prophetic tradition in relation to the purpose of seeking knowledge, methods of discipline, instructional strategies, types of knowledge that is worth learning, and assessment techniques. Given the scope of and focus of this paper, however, I will conclude this paper with a brief discussion of the instructional strategies of the Prophet ﷺ.

Of utmost importance in understanding the Pedagogy of the Prophet ﷺ is to recognize that he ﷺ was most aware of the individual learning styles and abilities of those around him. He therefore would employ instructional strategies contextually and not rely on one particular method. He ﷺ taught in many different ways: through his noble character, in stages to remove boredom, using dialogue, with various forms of questioning, with analogy, similes, drawing, through silence, humour, repetition, allusion, and narrating stories and anecdotes among many others.<sup>6</sup> What is most common among teachers today is there inability to adjust their teaching instruction to large classes by the individual needs of their students. Granted teaching large classes is part and parcel of the model of mass schooling and the easiest stress relief for teachers is to employ a technique that will reach the majority of students; this, however, does not omit a Muslim teacher of the responsibility of reaching and maximizing the potential of every student. We must turn to the Prophetic tradition to understand how he ﷺ taught in order to reflect on how those methods can be adopted and adapted into our current educational circumstance. Below are a few examples that illuminate the Prophet’s ﷺ teaching techniques.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah, Translated by Mahomed Mahomed (2003). *Prophet Muhammad ﷺ -- The Teacher: And his teaching methodologies*. Zam Zam Publishers, Karachi Pakistan.

<sup>7</sup> The following three *hadith* were analyzed during an 8 session lecture series organized by Nadeem Memon at the University of Toronto. The lecture series was entitled “The Pedagogy of the Messenger of Allah” and was taught by Shaykh Talal Ahdab between October 2006 and April 2007. Summary notes and recordings of these sessions are available by request.

The following *hadith* is quoted in Imam Bukhari's Book of Knowledge, *hadith* #61, narrated by Ibn 'Umar:

The Prophet said, "Amongst the trees, there is a tree, the leaves of which do not fall and is like a Muslim. Tell me the name of that tree." Everybody started thinking about the trees of the desert areas. And I thought of the date-palm tree. The others then asked, "Please inform us what is that tree, O Allah's Apostle?" He replied, "It is the date-palm tree."

The significance of this *hadith* is that by using the analogy between the date-palm tree and the believer, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was able to illustrate the characteristics of a Muslim that the companions could easily relate to. The analogy shows the believer is someone who is constant, strong, and firm in their belief, they provide shade for others, and produce fruit from their service. The believer is grounded, firm, and rooted in their *deen* and does not become affected by change over time or the weather. The believer similar to the date-palm tree goes deep, very deep in the earth, penetrating the earth deeply to get drops of water and lives off very little water – what little water it does consume it works hard for. All these comparisons are implied by the simple analogy rich in meaning that the Prophet ﷺ employed.<sup>8</sup> To the companions this analogy meant that nothing affects the Muslim's conviction in Allah: fame, money, tragedy, difficulty – the Muslim always stands firm. The believer can survive in multiple environments and can adapt to all situations with the conviction that both difficulty and ease are both from Allah. Just as everything in the date palm tree is of benefit, so too is everything about the believer beneficial. In a date tree, the leaves, fruit, date pits, tree trunk, sap, bark, are of benefit. The fruit of the date palm tree can be eaten at every stage of its development and has unique benefits at each stage. Similarly, the believer radiates benefit to everything around him/her and at every stage in their life.

In addition to the wisdom that this *hadith* teaches in terms of the role of the believer, pedagogically this *hadith* establishes standards for teaching practice as well. The Prophet ﷺ employed a form of rhetorical questioning to grab the attention and spark the interest among the companions. A reflective reader of the *hadith* literature will notice that the Prophet ﷺ used various forms of questioning for varied purposes based on the context and need. In this circumstance by questioning he wanted his companions to be alert and think on the spot. And coupling the rhetorical question with an image was geared to those who have imaginative and naturalistic intelligence. Using an analogy of the date-palm tree engaged the companions with something tangible that they could relate to. The example made what could have been an abstract and

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<sup>8</sup> The lessons learned from this *hadith* were taught at Shaykh Talal Ahdab's lecture series in Toronto, Canada in January 2007 entitled *Pedagogy of the Messenger of Allah* at the University of Toronto Faculty of Education.

theoretical discussion into knowledge that could be readily understood. The adab that Ibn Umar displayed in keeping silent in this particular circumstance also reveals great wisdom that is beyond the scope of this paper but worthy to note.

In another *hadith*, #73, in Imam Bukhari's Book of Knowledge, great lessons both for the teacher and the student can be drawn.

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud was heard to say that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "You can only have envy for two things: for a man to whom Allah has given wealth which he spends for the truth, and for a man to whom Allah has given wisdom and he acts by it and teaches it."

The use of the word *hasad* (envy) was used in this teaching moment by the Prophet ﷺ again as a technique to grab the attention of the companions. But, interestingly, this *hadith* has nothing to do with envy in the negative sense of the word. An understanding of *balagha* (semantics) is necessary to read into the Qur'an and the language of the prophetic tradition. *Hasad* (envy) is most commonly known to be blameworthy and incompatible with *imaan* (faith). The companions knew that and that's why when the Prophet used the word, the companions listened attentively. The word *hasad* conjures sharp images in the believer because the first sin ever committed was in heaven with *Shaytaan's hasad* of Adam (*alayhi as salatu as salam*). The first sin ever committed on earth was by the sons of Adam who killed the other over *hasad* of who his brother married. *Hasad*, therefore, reveals much deeper problems – in the case of *Iblees*, it revealed his arrogance. But there are two types of *hasad*: blameworthy and praiseworthy. *Hasad ghibtah* is the praiseworthy form of *hasad* where a believer is happy for the other person and wishes he had what others have, an admiration. This is the type of *hasad* that the *hadith* is speaking of.

The core message of the *hadith* is that the Prophet ﷺ is trying to turn our attention to the two things that will benefit us both the most in this world and the next. For someone to fulfill these two forms of competitive spirit one must have some understanding/learning/*hikmah* and that's why the *hadith* is preceded by the need to understand *fiqh*/knowledge/wisdom. Wealth on its own is not the end goal. And same with the second part of the *hadith*, the end goal is not to seek knowledge alone but to encourage others toward it.

In terms of the teaching technique then, it is not only what you say as a teacher but how you say it. The Prophet grabbed the attention of the believers with the word(s) he used (i.e. *hasad*) – like a form of shock therapy knowing that it would peak their interest. Generalizations that can be drawn from this are that the Prophet ﷺ recognized the need to engage student interest and to use language that would stimulate learning. Enthusiasm for learning was not taken for granted even in the time of the Prophet ﷺ. There are other *hadith* in the tradition

that more clearly portray the wisdom in teaching on alternate days and at varied times so as to not bore the students. This *hadith* on the other hand exemplifies another approach to peak student interest and that is to use language in unexpected ways. The Prophet ﷺ's command over Arabic and his awareness of how his companions thought about certain topics allowed him to creatively extend their prior learning with new ways of looking at the concept of *hasad* in this example.

The last *hadith* that I will discuss to exemplify a few of the teaching techniques that the Prophet ﷺ exercised to impart knowledge is *hadith* 79 in the Book of Knowledge.

Abu Musa narrated that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "The example of the guidance and knowledge with which Allah has sent me is like the abundant rain which strikes the earth.

Some of it is fertile and accepts the water and brings forth plants and grass in abundance.

Some of it is hard and holds the water enabling Allah to let people use it. They drink from it, water their animals and irrigate.

Some of the land it strikes is level and barren and does not retain the water nor produce plants.

The first is the example of someone who understands the deen of Allah and benefits from that with which Allah has sent me and learns and teaches.

The last is the example of the person who pays no attention to it and does not accept the guidance with which I have been sent."

Abu 'Abdullah said, "Some of it on which water falls is level and the water rises over it when the ground is level and smooth."

About knowledge and what we can gain from the example of our beloved Prophet ﷺ this *hadith* confirms that the journey of seeking knowledge is a lengthy process. Seeds are planted and nurtured but growth comes at its own course with time. The abundance of rain implies that there is enough knowledge and wisdom for all of humanity. But most notably, this *hadith* teaches that guidance must precede knowledge which is highly instructive for our own teaching endeavors in schools. The emphasis on guiding our children toward the *sirat al mustaqeem* (the straight path) is an absolutely necessary precursor to teaching all other forms of knowledge. Prior to the guidance of the Prophet ﷺ humanity was in a dire state. The earth was so dry it needed abundant rain and what came was not just abundant rain that could be of potential harm – it was *ghayth* – beneficial rain. The Prophet was sent at a time when the world was in total darkness, injustice was everywhere, the strong oppressed the weak, freedom was restricted, ethical corruption, and sins were rampant. With the Prophet's message then it was like Allah had given life after death; a renewal of society – of the earth.

In regards to teaching instruction, although employing analogies, this *hadith* is unique in the richness in imagery that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used to describe knowledge. Undoubtedly, stories and parables are great teaching techniques because they are very powerful in imagination, everyone can experience it, and relate to it. It should not be overused but it should be employed from time to time. In oral cultures great teachers taught with parables as is evident in the New Testament and in this case the Prophetic tradition. What captures the interest of students however, is the wealth of descriptive language that enlivens a story and becomes embedded in the mind. Young children whose imagination is especially sharp can benefit from the linguistic imagery.

In the three *hadith* analyzed an Islamic school teacher can appreciate that pedagogical techniques can also be gained from the prophetic tradition. In the first *hadith* quoted, the Prophet ﷺ used a form of questioning to teach, in the second he specifically chose language that would raise the interest of the companions, and in the third *hadith* he described images to ingrain the meaning of knowledge to his companions. What is important for the standards of Islamic school teachers is to recognize that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught contextually. He taught with an awareness of the needs and abilities of his companions. He recognized at a very deep level that each individual has different learning strengths and styles for which he employed strategic teaching techniques. To raise the standard of our own teaching practice then we must reflect on not only the specific methods of teaching that the Prophet ﷺ employed, but more importantly the *hikmah* (wisdom) with which he taught.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

It would be a grave disservice to our tradition to assume that the techniques he ﷺ employed can be mirrored exactly in our classrooms. That is far from the objective of this paper. Contextually we live in different times and the challenges to our generation of teachers are undoubtedly unique. However, that said, what we can gain from the Prophetic tradition are the general principles and considerations by which he ﷺ taught. The way in which the learning ability and strengths of a student were nurtured, the variety of teaching techniques employed to suit each teachable moment differently, and the wisdom of what was taught, how it was taught, and when it was taught is what defines the pedagogical tradition in Islam. What we need then, in the words of Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, is a “fertile synthesis” between the pedagogical principles of the Islamic tradition and that of contemporary educational thought.<sup>9</sup> To raise the standards of Islamic schools, we must begin by recognizing that the Islamic

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<sup>9</sup> Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, *The Essence of Islamic Education* (2001), IHYA Productions, CD4

tradition has much to offer pedagogically. The contribution of Islamic schools to this fertile synthesis cannot then simply be limited to appending Qur'anic and Islamic studies to a public education curriculum. Reflection, recognition, and application of the principles of an Islamic pedagogy are, therefore, paramount.

Granted in this short paper, I was not able to elaborate on all the areas of which I feel that Islamic education must revive its pedagogical tradition. However, suffice it to say that the mode of analyzing educative moments from the Prophetic tradition as modeled in this paper is an integral technique for administrators and teachers in Islamic schools to consider.

We need to consider how the curriculum framework of Islamic education as extrapolated from the *Hadith* Jibril can reframe the curriculum structures we use in Islamic schools. We need to go beyond appending and integrating Islam on to conventional curriculum structures and consider the potential for an Islamically based restructuring. By addressing the imbalance of imparting *ihsaan*, issues in classroom management, and school administrative policies, teacher roles and responsibilities will become more reflective on Islamic principles of education. And reflecting on the prophetic tradition, instructional and assessment techniques that were employed by our beloved Prophet ﷺ will give teachers the ability to meet the needs of all student learners.

My own personal suggestion is that Islamic schools not take for granted that every Muslim teacher is aware of the depth and richness of the Prophetic tradition in relation to teaching and learning. Each school should therefore develop and implement a series of professional development workshops for their staff that illuminates the pedagogical practices of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and use those techniques as the teaching standard for our schools.