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‘Ilm

paper 8

Mufeed

The Teacher

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Introduction

“You cannot learn without a teacher.”

لَا بُدَّ مِنْ مُعَلِّمٍ

Ikhwan us Safa

This basic truth is illustrated by a simple example: in birds, the babies who are fed by their parents are able to fly high in the sky; those who peck at their food and feed themselves are not able to fly properly. So for example pigeons soar high in the sky, while chickens can only fly a few feet above the ground at most before they come down.

The Ikhwan believe that the soul is potentially and intuitively knowledgeable, it needs guidance to become actually learned. For this reason by far the most important factor in the journey of knowledge for each and every human being is to have a ‘*mufeed-e-haqq*’, a true teacher in the broadest and deepest sense of the word, a proper guide, a mentor, a counsellor. This is the first task of a seeker of knowledge (*taalib ilm*): to find the correct teacher.

For a considerable period of time, knowledge and especially the higher knowledge was passed down orally, ‘from mouth to ear’, in order to safeguard it from the unworthy and the malicious; so there was no recourse but to learn from a teacher. Even after books were written and accessible, there are several other reasons why there is so much emphasis on the right teacher. The general benefits of being taught by a teacher as opposed to self-learning are widely known and accepted and practiced. A Japanese proverb says, “more than a thousand days of diligent study is one day with a good teacher.”

An extra dimension is added where *deen* is concerned in particular. The written word including the Quran and the *Hadith* (written long ago in a different time and context) can have more than one interpretation, sometimes conflicting interpretations. It is only the teacher who has the true knowledge who can then tell you which is the correct interpretation. Then there are numerous words and terms that have a specific connotation in specific contexts; only the teacher with true knowledge can explain that particular meaning. Such a teacher can only engrave the true ‘picture’ of the doctrines of *dawat (aqeeda)*, therefore, upon the heart.

Moreover, there is also the element of moral right and wrong, good and bad. Different people have different goals, different values and priorities, and different scales of right and wrong in life. The true scale is that set by the *shariat*, but the wisdom and reasons underlying the-prescriptions of the *shariat*, are not in the capacity of all humans to understand; it is only after one has trained his soul and risen in levels of *ilm* can one comprehend these. It

would take such a teacher to explain the varied nuances and lay the correct emphasis in the correct places in order to inculcate the correct values and the correct standard of good/bad behaviour in the student.

A teacher who is a mentor and guide and guru for not just intellectual knowledge but for behaviour and character and doctrines and words and deeds.	مُعَلِّمٌ، مُؤَدِّبٌ، أَسْتَاذٌ فِي تَعْلِيمِهِ تَخْلُقُهُ وَأَقَاوِيلُهُ وَأَعْتِقَادِهِ وَأَعْمَالِهِ وَصَنَائِعِهِ
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Ikhwan us Safa

First Teachers: Parents

Your first teachers are your parents. As soon as a child is born, he comes under the influence of his parents and the people immediately around him. The Ikhwan us Safa say that it is from them that the initial foundation for his faith, character, outlook in life etc. is laid. After the fourth year, as learning by imitation increases exponentially, along with language the child begins to acquire character traits, habits, doctrinal values etc. as a result of contact with those around him. Small children believe that their parents are perfect and want to be like them. So more than instruction or training what is required and is of paramount importance at this age in particular is setting a good role model for them to emulate. Keeping in mind that the child will pick up everything regardless of whether they want him to learn a particular thing or not, the parents should try to be what they want their child to be, should do what they want their child to do.

The Ikhwan say that the mind of the innocent child is like a blank paper: one can write on it what one will, and what is written – whether truth or falsehood – will fill the paper; then it will be difficult to erase it and write something else in its place. Care should be taken that only the true beliefs are ingrained in the child's mind, for once wrong beliefs or opinions are established it will be difficult to replace them.

The general outlook of the parents as a whole has a very strong impact on the child. If the parents give weight to and practice *deen* conscientiously, the child is very likely to retain that consciousness. In broader terms, if the parents are constantly and in all things mindful of the presence of the Divine Creator – in such simple ways for example as mentioning Him regularly, attributing all creation including the wonders of nature to Him, and thanking Him frequently for His blessings – they will awaken that awareness in the child's mind for all time. Parents should develop the interest, curiosity and sense of wonder that is innate in every child, but needs to be fostered and encouraged or it may die. In general, and even in spiritual matters, matters of *deen*.

Parents should therefore be conscious about their huge responsibility, since this early foundation will take the child a very long way in living a life of awareness, of his environment, and ultimately of his soul and of the presence of the Divine in everything; this will form the foundation and give him the impetus for the pursuit of *ilm* throughout his life. *Maulana Ali SA* has said,

Knowledge – the basic <i>aqeeda</i> of <i>deen</i> and the attitude of awareness – is the best inheritance you can give your children.	الْعِلْمُ وَرَاثَةٌ كَرِيمَةٌ
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Mentors

While parents are the main influence on a child and continue to be of major relevance all through his life, other mentors or teachers play a very big part as well. They could be aunts, uncles, friends, neighbours, school teachers, and basically anyone who has a position of love and authority in the mind of the child. Such people also have a role in fostering this attitude of conscious living or learning.

The Ikhwaan us Safa state that all the many different types of knowledge are noble, possessing them is honour, pursuit of them is survival for the body and the soul, acquiring them is peace for the mind, right-guidance and escape from the darkness of ignorance, and betterment in this world and the hereafter. Certain types of *ilm* are however more honourable and noble than others, and so naturally are their teachers. The knowledge of *deen* is the noblest of all *ilm*, and the best most virtuous of teachers are the teachers of *deen*, who are themselves sincerely pious and devout, who have a strong conviction and clear perception about the hereafter.

The Ikhwan us Safa say,

“Every <i>ilm</i> or craft should be sought from those proficient in them,”	اسْتَعِينُوا عَلَى كُلِّ صِنَاعَةٍ بِأَهْلِهَا
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Prophets: The Tutors & Teachers of Mankind

So also for *deen*. To acquire the true *deen* and the true knowledge of *deen*, it is necessary to go to the right people, find the right teachers. The *anbiya* are the first teachers (*muallims*) and tutors of mankind (*muaddibs*); their teachers are the angels, and the teacher of the angels is Allah *ta'ala*, the supreme teacher of all. The Ikhwan us Safa call the *anbiya* the guardians (*khuzẓan*) of God's *ilm*, and the *Imams* are the heirs of the *Anbiya*. The heirs to the *ilm* of the *Imams* are the *Duat*. *Rasullullah SA* has said,

Take knowledge from the scholar of the <i>Ahl al-Bait</i> , the <i>Imams</i> , or from him who has taken knowledge from the scholar of the <i>Ahl al-Bait</i> , the <i>Dai</i> , if you want salvation from hellfire.	تَعَلَّمُوا مِنْ عَالِمِ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي أَوْ مِمَّنْ تَعَلَّمَ مِنْ عَالِمِ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي تَنْجُوا مِنَ النَّارِ
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The Quran says,

"Ask the people of the " <i>ziker</i> " (the Able Bayt of Rasulullah) if you do not know something [of the Quran and deen]."	فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ
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Quran 16:43

Learn from the *Nabi*, the *Imam*, and the *Dai* and from him who has learnt from them and from him who teaches with the permission of the *Dai*. He who accepts the knowledge of *deen* from such scholars and teachers will be guided onto the right path. Such a *mumin* also becomes an heir to the *ilm* of the *anbiya*.

'Good Teachers' & 'Bad Teachers'

There are good teachers (*mufeede haqq*) and bad teachers (*mufeede batil*). The scholar, who has studied with and has absorbed what he has been taught by a *mufeede haqq*, if he has certain positive qualities, in turn becomes a *mufeede haqq* himself. On the other hand, a scholar who has not learnt from a *mufeede haqq*, or if he has done so he has not taken in what he was taught correctly, or has certain negative qualities, is a *mufeede batil*. These are some of the positive and negative traits of good and bad teachers as defined by the Ikhwan us Safa:

Traits of a Mufeede Haqq

Traits of a Mufeede Batil

1.	<div> <p><i>Niyyat</i>, intention in learning and teaching is sincere. He is pure and clean of heart, feels it is a duty to give others of the great boons he has received. He loves his students and cares for their rise in the <i>darajaat</i> of knowledge as an affectionate father, or like a concerned doctor, giving his full effort</p> </div>	<div> <p>Intention in learning and teaching is selfish and bad. Wants to make a name for himself, to be well-known, to be in a position of importance, to be considered a leader and have power over others, to gain material wealth etc.</p> </div>
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and time in order to achieve the desired result. <i>Mustansir Imam</i> charged <i>Sayyedna Muayyad</i> to undertake the edification of the <i>mumeneen</i> like an affectionate father (<i>waalide mushfiq</i>).	
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2.

Intelligent and knowledgeable in the <i>abkaam</i> of <i>deen</i> , and aware of the deeper spiritual realities. Teaches only what he has learnt and absorbed himself. When asked a question about something he does not know, does not make up a fake answer but instead admits that he does not know or is not sure.	He does not possess much knowledge or <i>hikmat</i> , nor has he understood the true meaning of the Quranic <i>ayats</i> or other <i>bayaans</i> in other <i>kitabs</i> , but he thinks he knows everything and is always ready to argue and put forward his own viewpoint against other scholars. He speaks about the sub branches when he does not know the roots. By talking about things he has actually not mastered, he creates confusion in the minds of students, but by assuming a position of authority he influences the minds of people who have not much knowledge.
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3.

Teaches with care and patience, according to the intelligence and training level of his students, adjusting the pace and manner of teaching as appropriate to their mind set and level of understanding to give the maximum benefit, making sure each level of knowledge is strong and sturdy before moving to the next. He is circumspect and sparing in the teaching, giving of knowledge little by little only to those who are zealously and passionately eager and keen, after a thorough examination of their circumstances and intentions. He answers questions patiently and in a manner that is suited to their mental capacity and *daraja* of *ilm* so that they will understand.

Does not teach according to the levels of the student, giving more to him who does not deserve it – for e.g. starting *haqeeqat* when they have not even studied *taweeel* – and/or giving less to him who does. Goes deep into matters which are subtle and complex, *mutashabeaat*, when the students are not trained yet and have not yet reached that level of understanding.

4.

A true believer, because of absolute faith and conviction, he practises what he preaches, and teaches by example. Guides his students towards *jannat*.

Because of lack of true conviction, *yaqeen*, or the dominance of vices in his character, he does not practice what he preaches, not in *deendaari*, nor in *akehlaq*, nor in all his actions and interactions. His words will not have any weight with students if his actions are contradictory. As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words.

5.

Humble before God, and humility in dealing with people, congenial, pleasant and approachable. *Ja'far us Sadiq Imam* says, a teacher should be modest and good-natured with his students, not a dictatorial tyrant. Maintains discipline with

Full of arrogance and false pride (*kibr* and *iftikhaar*). He is severe and unapproachable, his students are afraid of him. He is so full of self-conceit and trying to prove his own worth that he is completely uncaring of the needs of his students.

understanding/ consideration/ a cordial manner; is not too lenient nor too strict.	
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6.	<p>Love of knowledge is a vital dynamic part of his being. Is broad-minded, respects knowledge in others and is open to what is valuable in others' learning, looking for the truth always. Is not prejudiced or biased against any other field of knowledge or school of thought; prejudice distorts and blinds the intellect.</p>	<p>Is close-minded, prejudiced against any other <i>ilm</i> besides his own. He harbours ill feeling towards other fields of knowledge and their scholars.</p> <p>"He is unwilling to learn from others, and stops his students from doing so."</p> <p>فَلَا هُمْ يَتَعَلَّمُونَ وَلَا يَتَرَكُونَ غَيْرَهُمْ يَتَعَلَّمُونَ</p> <p>The Ikhwan say that one should beware of such people, they are enemies of learning and people of learning, indeed opposite of what the Ikhwaan believe.</p>
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7.	<p>Good character, good human being. Devout and pious, <i>zāhid</i>, not craving material things. The Ikhwan us Safa say that one learned man who is <i>zāhid</i> in this world and more interested in the hereafter is better than a thousand scholars who are hankering for material things.</p>	<p>Bad character. Greedy, with an untiring appetite for this world, which brings with it all manner of bad traits. The Ikhwaan say,</p> <p>إِنَّ حُبَّ الدُّنْيَا رَأْسُ كُلِّ خَبِيئَةٍ وَالْحِرْصُ فِي طَلِبِهَا مَرَضٌ لِلنُّفُوسِ وَسَقَامٌ لَهَا</p> <p>"Craving for this material world is the root of all sin and greed in its pursuit is a sickness and a disease of the soul."</p> <p>He is like a doctor who claims to heal others while he himself is sick and cannot heal himself.</p>
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The worst fate and mis-fortune one can have would be to get a teacher who is a *muftede batil*. Such scholars are called scholars of ignorance or scholars of evil (*uloma ud dalal* or *uloma us su*). Though technically they may be well versed in *ilm* and knowledgeable in *deen*,

such so-called scholars use their intelligence for wrongful purposes and distortion of *aqeeda*, even lying and fabricating false doctrines to suit their own nefarious purposes, doctrines which are actually contradictory to the Quran and the *kitabs* of *Anbiya Ullah*. The Ikhwan describe two types of these false scholars: 1. devils in human form (*Shayateen ul ins*), who fabricate wrongful doctrines (*baatil tasawur*), and spread these rampantly amongst the people as if they are true; and 2. devils in spectral form (*Shayateen ul jinn*), so-called because their true form is concealed, they do not profess their erroneous false doctrines openly but spread their poison in secrecy. While they speak fluently, the hearts of such scholars are black and blind, their hearts are closed to the true meaning of what they teach. *Rasulullah SA* has said,

The most I fear for my <i>ummat</i> is a man who is knowledgeable and eloquent of speech but whose heart and mind is closed to <i>haqq</i> .	إِنَّ أَخَوْفَ مَا أَخَافُ عَلَى أُمَّتِي رَجُلٌ عَلِيمٌ لِّسَانٍ جَاهِلٌ الْقَلْبِ
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There is no one more damaging to the rightly guided people, the *Anbiya* and teachers of *haqq* and *mumineen*, than these evil teachers: they change the the true creed (*sahib aqeeda*), of any *mumin* who comes within their grasp, by indoctrinating him with false tenets, making his once luminous spirit (*noorani surat*), into a black spectre (*zulmaani surat*).

Husain Imam AS has said,

O scholars of evil, you sit at the gates of heaven not doing such deeds (having proper <i>aqeeda</i> and doing rightful <i>amal</i>) that permit you to enter <i>jannat</i> , nor allowing others to pass by you so that they may enter.	يَا غُلَمَاءَ الشُّوءِ جَلَسْتُمْ عَلَى بَابِ الْجَنَّةِ فَلَا أَنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ فَتَسْتَوْجِبُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا تَتْرَكُونَ أَحَدًا يَجُوزُكُمْ فَيَصِلُ إِلَيْهَا
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The Ikhwan warn their brothers most emphatically, to beware of such scholars of ignorance. The *mufeede haqq* gives life to your soul, while the scholars of ignorance kill your soul completely. The Ikhwan calls them devils with the strength of *Dajjal* "(the formidable highly successful archenemy of *haqq* and the *sahib ul-haqq*).” The Ikhwan strictly advise people that if they cannot find a *mufeede haqq* they should not ever go to a *mufeede batil*, but instead do as much they can by themselves, using their own intellectual ability and powers of logic to get to the truth.

Conclusion

The greatest good fortune for any man, say the Ikhwan us Safa, and one of the biggest bounties of God upon his servant, is that he finds a good teacher, a *muftede haqq*. “Know that such a teacher is the begetter of your soul and the cause of its creation and the essence of its life, in the same way as your father is the begetter of your body and the cause of its existence. Your father gives you your physical form, while your teacher gives you your spiritual form. Your father brings you up and prepares you to make your living in this transient world, while your teacher nourishes your soul with knowledge and wisdom and prepares it for and guides it to everlasting bliss... Therefore, o brother! Pray to God to bless you with a righteous, wise and upright teacher, and thank Him for His bounty if you have already found such a one.”