

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as the perfect teacher

Introduction

One day, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) entered the mosque and saw two groups of Companions seated. The first group were reciting the Qur'ān praying to Allāh. The second group were teaching and learning one another. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) chose to sit with the second group, the ones that were learning and teaching. As he sat with them, he remarked:

و انما بعثت معلما

'I have been sent [to humanity] only as a teacher'

We remember and describe him (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) as the Prophet, the Messenger, the Nur, the Mercy for all mankind and much more. He (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) remembered himself as a teacher.

His brilliant teaching methods

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) had all the traits of a perfect teacher:

1. **Clarity:** When he was teaching he spoke very clearly so the Companions could understand. Sayyida A'isha (may Allāh be pleased with her) reports:

The Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) would not hasten his speech, rather he would speak very clearly with each word spaced out. Whoever sat with him immediately understood his speech.

The Companions preserved each and every aspect of the Prophet's life, such as how he ate, how he prayed, and most importantly, what he said. This was easy for the Companions to do because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was a brilliant teacher and was unbelievably clear in his speech.

2. **Avoid Information overload:** Today experts stress that students should not be overburdened with information. It will not help. Relentless lessons every day of the same subject does not help, because students get bored. Long lessons are sometimes counterproductive because a person's concentration span is only about 45 minutes.

In all of these, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was the perfect teacher.

*There are several ahādith in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) started with the words 'there are three...'

ثلاث من كن فيه وجد حلاوة الإيمان

There are three that have tasted the sweetness of Imaan...

ثلاثة لا يكلمهم الله يوم القيامة

There are three that Allāh will not speak to on Judgement Day...

ثلاث دعوات مستجابات

There are three answered Duas...

ثلاثة يؤتون أجرهم مرتين

There are three who will get double the reward...

This avoids information overload. Three things are easy for everyone to remember.

*The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) did not teach every day. He had breaks and gaps. The reason for this was so that his Companions would not be overloaded with information, which is never helpful. Moreover it was time for them to act upon and implement the knowledge he had passed on.

3. **Repetition equals retention.** In other words, teachers today ensure that the important parts of the lesson are repeated. A plenary in a lesson serves this function. This is a prophetic quality. He would repeat his words thrice on many occasions, so that no one would forget. On one occasion, he kept saying:

و الله لا يؤمن و الله لا يؤمن و الله لا يؤمن

‘By Allāh, he is not a believer!’ By Allāh, he is not a believer!’ By Allāh, he is not a believer!’

The Companions asked ‘Who is not a believer? He replied ‘The one whose neighbour does not feel safe from him.’

4. **Practicals:** Experts warn against teachers talking too much and relying on the text book alone. It makes the lesson boring. It makes it harder to remember. Many subject lessons are now very practical, with demonstrations that will stay in the head of the pupil.

a. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was a great advocate of this. He would often give practical lessons so the people around him would understand him.

Once he placed a mark in three places on the bare ground. One was placed next to him, one far away and one a few feet in front of him. He asked his Companions if they knew what he had done. They replied that they did not. The Prophet explained that the mark nearest to him represented man. The mark furthest away from him represented the desires, wishes and dreams of man. In between these two pieces of mark was another piece of mark and this represented death. The point that the Prophet made was that man always has a long list of desires, hopes and expectations, but death always come in between him and these desires.

b. As much as possible, our Messenger taught through practical means. Once, in the season of winter, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) shook a branch and as a result, the leaves began to fall with ease to the ground. He then remarked that when a believer performs Salāh for the sake of Allāh, then his sins fall off his body as easy as the leaves of a tree.

5. **The use of good examples and analogies.** In order to make the lesson easier to remember and understand, teachers must use examples.

*Jabir reports that on one occasion, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was with his Companions in a bazaar. He passed by a dead lamb that had short ears, and was defective. He asked his Companions, ‘who wants to buy this for one Dirham? They all said no. He then asked, ‘will anyone want it for free?’ They replied, ‘even if it was alive, then we would not want it because it has defective ears. Now that it is dead it is no good. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said: ‘This world is more insignificant in the eyes of Allāh than this dead lamb.’ In other words, it is worthless.

6. **The good use of stories** was also a favourite method of teaching for Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). The story of the three men stuck

in the cave is an excellent example of that. Importantly, all of his stories were true and actually happened. He did not need to resort to lies, fairytales and fables.

7. **Make it memorable.** Teachers are always finding ways to make a lesson memorable. If they can do that, then the teachings of the lesson will long stay in the mind of the student. Hadith Jibril is a perfect example of a lesson that will never be forgotten, purely because it was so memorable.

These are just a handful of points that all indicate that Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was indeed the perfect teacher. It is now up to us to be the perfect pupils of his.

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