CONVERGENCE

Parallels Within the Educational Methodology of Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad

Dr. Aboul Makarem Sabra Lutz Layla Saad

IN THE NAME OF GOD — THE ALL MERCIFUL, THE MOST MERCIFUL

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Introduction

Educational reform and development represent the foundation for a people's ascent and social progress. In today's rapidly changing world, education has become crucial, and teachers bear the primary responsibility for shaping the coming generations by formulating and implementing an educational structure based upon a strong foundation and clear blueprint.

While new developments in education theory are continually being introduced, we should recognize that we already have an incredibly successful template for lasting educational impact—the legacy of three Abrahamic prophets: Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon them (*pbut*[1]) and the religious texts associated with them. These inspired educators sought to uplift their people's minds and moral qualities through numerous educational methods that remain beneficial today.

[1] This honorific is hereafter assumed after every prophet's name (*pbuh*) or (*pbut*) shortened.

Therefore, we should study their proven and tested edification process and incorporate it within our educational systems.

The teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are simple at their core, yet profound in their effect. Given that they were not limited to theoretical thoughts and convictions but included the applied aspect of altering actions and behaviors, the prophetic teachings focused on the practical aspect of edification. As a result, their teachings have served as beacons of light guiding people for thousands of years.

Our examination of the prophets as teachers focuses exclusively on Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad not only because their followers represent half of the world's population, but also because of the availability of reference materials that document their teachings, as embodied by the *Hebrew Bible* (Old Testament in the *Christian Bible*), the New Testament (the *Christian Bible* is comprised of the Old Testament and the New Testament together), and the Qur'an and Ḥadīth (authenticated narrations of Prophet Muḥammad's teachings), respectively.

In order to best benefit educators of diverse beliefs, this booklet does not delve into prophetic miracles or dogmatic differences. Any mention of miraculous events is intended only to study how these prophets handled a given situation, thereby focusing on the process used rather than the outcome.

The variety of educational approaches utilized by the prophets demonstrates a clear understanding of their people's condition and an ability to identify the most impactful methods to accomplish their goals. Although each prophet adapted the teaching process to his respective society, they all showed powerful similarities in their approaches and in the adaptive process itself.

Restoring their educational methodology does not require ignoring or minimizing the achievements of scientific research. Rather, their teaching methods align with scientific aspects in the field of education, particularly educational psychology. More appropriately, one can say that contemporary scientific research echoes their teaching methods. This booklet cites events that highlight each prophet's character, teaching mindset, consideration given to the recipients' psychology, and a gradual progression in conveying their message. It emphasizes the importance of studying and adapting the wisdom contained in their teachings to the particularities of time and place, just as the prophets did.

This booklet is neither a comprehensive study of the prophets' lives nor an in-depth study of edification theory, rather, it is an analysis of how the prophets approached their identity as teachers and delivered their teachings. As this booklet does not assume that the reader is explicitly familiar with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, we have limited our sources to each faith's standard texts.

In addition to the principal focus of studying the edification process that the prophets utilized, this booklet highlights the commonality of belief and harmony within the three Abrahamic holy books, especially as it relates to holistic principles and moral values. This is compatible with the monotheistic core within the teachings of Prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad and the fulfillment of the "common word" as a shared goal.

We hope that the resulting work will be useful to a wide variety of educators and students regardless of their background or religious affiliation.

CHAPTER ONE

The Prophets as Teachers

1. Heavens, listen to me. Then I will speak.
Earth, hear the words of my mouth.
Let my teaching fall like rain.

2. Let my words come down like dew.
Let them be like raindrops on new grass.
Let them be like rain on tender plants.

—DEUTERONOMY, 32: 1-2

Teaching was a principal goal of the prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad and they prioritized it as such. In their quest to teach, the prophets motivated their people to learn and seek knowledge by emphasizing the value of learning.

Since the prophets understood that the essence of their mission was to spread knowledge, they encouraged their followers to pass on what they had learned to others. Importantly, they recognized that they were not only teachers but students as well. They listened to advice and benefited from others' expertise, then employed it to develop and refine their own edification methods.

While all three prophets were natural leaders, they underwent preparation for their mission. This involved engaging in introspection and self-improvement prior to, and throughout, their own edification process. Like all teachers, the prophets still faced many difficulties and challenges in teaching their people. To overcome such challenges, the prophets used practical methods to simplify ideas and concepts such as providing similes and turning mistakes into a learning tool through a rectification process.

Despite the difficulties they faced and their students' diverse minds and behaviors, the prophets achieved their edification goals. Consequently, students, scholars, and researchers continue to study the *Hebrew Bible*, the New Testament, and the Qur'an and Ḥadīth to this day.

Teaching as a Primary Focus

Prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad (*pbut*) were sent as teachers to their people, and are named as such in their scriptures. In the passages below, we see that all three prophets were tasked not only with imparting knowledge but wisdom as well.

The *Hebrew Bible* affirms that Moses (*pbuh*) came as a teacher by saying:

> The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain. Stay here. I will give you the stone tablets. They contain the law and commandments I have written to teach the people."—EXODUS, 24: 12

The Qur'an also says, referring to Moses (*pbuh*):

> *And We have truly provided Moses the Scripture, so be not in contention of his meeting; and We have made it guidance to the Children of Israel.*—AS-SAJDAH, 32: 23

Jesus (*pbuh*) was known from a young age to spend time among the scholars learning and teaching:

> When the feast was about half over, Jesus went to the Temple and began to teach.—JOHN, 7: 14

Elsewhere, the New Testament tells us that when people called Jesus "teacher" he praised them by saying:

> "You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Master'—and rightly you say, for I am."—JOHN, 13: 13

Likewise, the Qur'an says about him:

> *For God will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, remember My favor upon you and upon your mother for I supported you with the Holy Spirit; you spoke to the people while in the cradle and in maturity; and [remember] when I taught you the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel…"*—AL-MA'IDAH, 5: 110

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) was a teacher who was dedicated to simplifying and facilitating the instructions that God assigned him to convey:

> "God did not send me to cause difficulty or distress, but sent me as a teacher and facilitator."—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #1478

God says in the Qur'an, referring to Muḥammad (*pbuh*):

> *Certainly did God oblige the faithful when He sent among them a messenger from themselves, reciting to them His*

> *signs and purifying them and teaching them the Scripture and wisdom, for they had been before in obvious misguidance.*—AAL-IMRAAN, 3: 164

In their quest to teach, the prophets motivated their people to learn and seek knowledge by emphasizing the value of learning. Muḥammad (*pbuh*) taught his companions:

> "Seeking knowledge is compulsory upon every Muslim; whoever seeks a path of learning then God will facilitate for him a path to Paradise; and the angels will lower their wings to the seeker of knowledge being pleased with his actions; and those in the Heavens and Earth will pray on the behalf of the scholar, even the whales in the waters; for the stature of the scholar over the average devout person is like the stature of the full moon over other celestial bodies; and the prophets did not bequeath a Dinar or a Dirham (money) rather they bequeathed knowledge, so whoever acquires it then he has acquired a great deal."—SUNAN ABĪ DĀWŪD, #3641

Moses encourages all people to seek knowledge in the following instructions to both the Levite priests and the elders of the Children of Israel:

> "Gather the people together. Gather the men, women and children. Also bring together the outsiders living in your towns. Then they can listen and learn to have respect for the Lord, your God. And they'll be careful to obey all the words of this law."—DEUTERONOMY, 31: 12

Jesus (*pbuh*) gave high priority to learning, and taught that it can have a greater long-term value than the daily tasks that are

often the focus of our attention. In this example he prioritized simple living and seeking knowledge over societal expectations, and stressed the need for all members of society to pursue knowledge:

> **38**. As they continued their journey, Jesus came to a village and a woman called Martha welcomed him to her house.
>
> **39.** She had a sister by the name of Mary who settled down at his feet and was listening to what he said.
>
> **40.** But Martha was very worried about her elaborate preparations and she burst in, saying, "'Lord, don't you mind that my sister has left me to do everything by myself? Tell her to get up and help me!"
>
> **41.** But Jesus answered her, "Martha, my dear, you are worried and bothered about providing so many things.
>
> **42.** Only a few things are really needed, perhaps only one. Mary has chosen the best part and you must not tear it away from her!"—LUKE, 10: 38-42

The scriptures emphasize teaching and learning, and when we analyze the prophets' methods, we realize that their practical educational approach is applicable beyond the scope of their message. They were sent as messengers from God, but that required more than simply receiving and transmitting words; in order to accomplish their goal, they had to become great educators who inspired their people.

Learning as a First Step

In the natural order of edification, the prophets were students who only became teachers after acquiring the necessary knowledge to assume that role. The pursuit of knowledge was a Divine order to not only the people, but to the prophets as well. As a result, they became role models for both teaching and seeking knowledge. As the Qur'an relates, Moses (*pbuh*) sought knowledge by embarking on an arduous journey, seeking a man whom God had directed him to learn from:

> *And they found a servant from among Our servants to whom We had given mercy from Us and had taught him, from Us, knowledge. Moses said to him: "May I follow you so that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgement?"*—AL-KAHF, 18: 65-66

The New Testament tells us that Moses also received edification from the Egyptians:

> Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.—ACTS, 7: 22

Jesus (*pbuh*) loved to learn and study while still a boy. The New Testament tells us of a time when he was twelve and stayed behind after Passover to learn in a temple:

> After three days, they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.—LUKE, 2: 46

In the Qur'an, God elevates the pursuit of knowledge to an element of faith and directly orders Muḥammad (*pbuh*) to pray for assistance in gaining knowledge:

> *… And, (O Muḥammad), do not hasten with the Qur'an before its revelation to you is completed, and say: "My Lord, increase me in knowledge."*—TA HA, 20: 114

Just as the prophets recognized that seeking knowledge applied to both themselves and their students, they understood the importance of teachers heeding advice and learning from the expertise of others then using it to develop and refine their own edification methods.

For example, in the *Hebrew Bible* we see how Moses responded to the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law:

> **13.** The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening.
>
> **14.** When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"
>
> **15.** Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will.
>
> **16.** Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and instructions."
>
> **17.** Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good.
>
> **18.** You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.

19. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him.

20. Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave.

21. But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

22. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you.

23. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.

24. Moses listened to his father-in-law. He did everything Jethro said.

25. He chose men of ability from the whole community of Israel. He made them leaders of the people. They became officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

26. They judged the people at all times. They brought the hard cases to Moses. But they decided the easy ones themselves.—EXODUS, 18: 13-26

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) often sought counsel from his wives. In one such instance, he faced a dilemma when the Muslims were prevented from performing their pilgrimage to Mecca due to

opposition from the Meccan leadership. He entered a treaty with the Meccans to postpone the pilgrimage until the next year. However, they were still in the ritual state of *Ihram*, a state in which Muslims refrain from many comforts until they complete certain pilgrimage rites.

In order to be released from this state, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) commanded the Muslims to complete the rites in their camp, as if they had performed their pilgrimage rites:

> "Get up and slaughter your offerings then shave your heads." The narrator, Umar ibn al-Khattab said: "But, by God, not a man among them got up even after the Prophet had repeated his order three times." Seeing this, the Prophet got up and went into the tent of his wife, Umm Salamah, and told her what he had experienced with the people outside. Umm Salamah said: "O Prophet of God, go out and do not speak to anyone of them, not a word, until you have slaughtered your offering and then call your shaver and have him shave your head." So, he stood up and went out, and did not speak to anyone of them a word until he had slaughtered his offering and called his shaver who shaved his head. When the Companions saw this, they stood up and slaughtered their offerings and started shaving one another.—Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī, #2732

Identifying Core Teaching Principles

While the prophets used a wide variety of effective teaching methods, most of them fell into one of three core categories: motivation, facilitation, and rectification. To be successful,

teachers must be conscious of a given approach's purpose so they can gauge its effectiveness, identify student needs and learning styles, and become more compelling educators.

All three prophets motivated their people, and were encouraged themselves, by the fact that the instructions and tasks they were conveying were easy, intuitive, and within the grasp and ability of everyone. In the Qur'an, God says:

> *"We have made the Qur'an easy for remembrance, so is there any who will remember?"*—AL-QAMAR, 54: 22

God inspired a similar sentiment through Moses (*pbuh*) in the *Hebrew Bible*:

> "What I'm commanding you today is not too hard for you. It isn't beyond your reach."—DEUTERONOMY, 30: 11

Jesus (*pbuh*) echoes this message of ease in the New Testament, saying:

> "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."—MATTHEW, 11: 30

The reiteration of this sentiment in all three traditions makes a powerful point: many edification challenges arise due to barriers that hinder the students' ability to understand and apply the information rather than the complexity of the content itself. An easy way to overcome these barriers is to facilitate understanding by finding relatable ways to teach the material.

One powerful facilitation method frequently used by the prophets is that of similes and parables. God says in the Qur'an:

> *"… and We strike these similes for the people so perhaps they may ponder."*—AL-HASHR, 59: 21

Due to the visceral nature of similes, they are memorable and impart large amounts of knowledge with few words. The *Hebrew Bible*'s Book of Proverbs contains numerous similes of profound meaning such as:

> Like apples of gold in settings of silver, is a word spoken at the proper time.—PROVERBS, 25: 11 and
>
> Like vinegar to the teeth or smoke to the eyes, so is a slacker to those who send him.—PROVERBS, 10: 26

As seen in the similes above, which include visual imagery, listeners experience a sensory reaction and can immediately understand certain elements of a lesson that may be otherwise lengthy or difficult to explain.

The New Testament relates numerous examples of Jesus (*pbuh*) utilizing similes. In the following passage, he specifically identifies the benefit of using a simile to illustrate an intangible concept:

> **30.** And he was saying, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it?
>
> **31.** It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is the smallest of all the seeds that are upon the soil,
>
> **32.** yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants, and forms large branches, with the result that the birds of the sky can nest under its shade."
>
> **33.** And with many such parables he was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to understand it.—MARK, 4: 30-33

In addition to motivation and facilitation, the prophets also used a process of rectification to introduce a beneficial learning opportunity when someone made a mistake. We see this modeled by Muḥammad (*pbuh*) in the following example:

> A man entered the mosque while the Prophet (*pbuh*) was sitting close by. The man prayed then went to greet the Prophet with peace. The Prophet said to him: "And upon you be peace—go back and pray for you have not prayed." So, he returned and prayed then went back to the Prophet, who told him again: "And upon you be peace—go back and pray for you have not prayed." And when this happened the third time he said: "Teach me, O messenger of God." He said: "When you get up to pray, first perform ablution well, then face the Qibla (direction of Mecca), then say *Allahu Akbar* (God is Greatest), and then recite some of what you know of the Qur'an, and then bow, and remain in this state till you feel serenity while bowing, and then raise your head and stand straight; and then prostrate till you feel serenity while prostrating, then sit up till you feel serenity while sitting; and then prostrate again till you feel serenity while prostrating; and then get up and stand straight, and do this throughout your prayer."—SUNAN ABĪ DĀWŪD, #856

Jesus (*pbuh*) corrected his disciples when they prevented the people from bringing their children for him to touch:

> **15.** They were also bringing their babies to him, that he might touch them. But when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

> **16.** Jesus summoned them, saying: "Allow the little children to come to me, and don't hinder them, for God's Kingdom belongs to such as these."—LUKE, 18: 15-16

Moses (*pbuh*) also demonstrated rectification by action when he demolished the calf that the Children of Israel began to worship while he was on Mount Sinai:

> "I also got that sinful calf you had made. I burned it in the fire. I crushed it and ground it into fine powder. Then I threw the powder into a stream that was flowing down the mountain."—DEUTERONOMY, 9: 21

As the prophets embarked on their journey of relaying the Divine message, they always focused on the main goal: teaching their people. This meant that they had to use each aspect of education in the right amount and at the right time. While they sought to motivate and encourage their people, as well as to simplify complex or new concepts, they did not shy away from pointing out and then rectifying errors and wrongs with word and action.

Preparing Future Teachers

Because they were aware that teaching did not stop at their doorstep, the prophets encouraged their followers to become teachers themselves and pass on what they learned. They identified and selected the most earnest and keen students to serve as both recipients and delegated teachers who would study in greater detail and transmit the knowledge they gained.

Instructing students to teach others also serves another, perhaps less obvious, purpose: it gives purpose to acquiring

knowledge and an immediate way to make use of it. Not only does asking students to spread knowledge benefit others, but it helps improve their own understanding of the teachings as well.

In the *Hebrew Bible* we see how Moses (*pbuh*) instructed his followers to be teachers to their children:

> **10.** Remember that day when you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me: "Gather the people to Me. I will declare My words to them so that they will learn to revere Me every day of their lives on the fertile land, and teach their children to do the same."—DEUTERONOMY, 4: 10

In the same book, he details how they should observe God's order:

> **6.** These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be in your heart.
>
> **7.** You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.—DEUTERONOMY, 6: 6-7

Not only were they instructed to teach future generations, they were also instructed to incorporate speaking God's word in every aspect of their lives, thus becoming teachers to everyone they met and even those they passed by.

The New Testament tell us that Jesus (*pbuh*) selected twelve of his most devout and dedicated students to act as teachers:

> **12.** In these days he went out to the mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God.

> **13.** When it was day, he called for his disciples, and of them he chose twelve, whom he named apostles.—LUKE, 6: 12-13

How he trained his apostles is a good example of remembering that new teachers still need support from their mentors. While he reminded them that they were still in the process of learning, he encouraged them to have confidence in their knowledge and training:

> **40.** "The disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is trained will be like his teacher."—LUKE, 6: 40

Following this, Jesus (*pbuh*) ensured that his apostles remained under his care even during their teaching:

> **30.** The apostles met with Jesus and told him everything of what they had done and what they had taught.
>
> **31.** Then he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest a while," for many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.—MARK, 6:,30

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) taught his companions to spread knowledge and made it clear to the faithful that their role was to not only embrace the message, but also to share it with others. He said:

> "May God gladden a man who hears something from us and conveys it as he heard it. Perhaps the one it is conveyed to is more understanding of it than the one who heard it."—JĀMIʿ AL-TIRMIDHĪ, #2657

and he encouraged them to learn so they could teach others:

> "The best among you are those who learn the Qur'an, then teach it."—Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī, #5027

He also prepared people to be persistent and patient, since one with knowledge always bears the responsibility of teaching others:

> "Teach and make it easy, teach and make it easy, teach and make it easy—and if you get angry then be silent, if you get angry then be silent."—Al-Bukhārī Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, #245

Being a teacher himself, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) understood the dedication and commitment required to spread knowledge and the repetition of his wording emphasizes that the process is arduous, exceedingly important, and requires perseverance. Since the process will repeat many times throughout one's life, he also addressed the likelihood of becoming frustrated and the necessity of exhibiting self-control.

Through the examples in this chapter, we can gain a clear understanding of the prophets' commitment to conveying the Divine message by becoming excellent teachers to their people. They refined their skills by learning both before and throughout their prophethoods and set an example of continuous self-improvement. While they focused heavily on encouragement and facilitation, they balanced it with rectification when necessary, providing us with a complete snapshot of the edification process. And, since they recognized that their goal was to convey the message to the widest audience possible, they encouraged and supported others in becoming teachers themselves so that the knowledge they sought to impart would reach future generations.

CHAPTER TWO

The Teacher's Character

"Better than a thousand days of diligent study is one day with a great teacher."

—Japanese Proverb (qtd. by Yoshifuru Kaibara)

The teacher's manners and character play a vital role in the success of the edification process. The prophets possessed outstanding manners both before their prophethood and throughout their entire lives. Their manners attracted people to seek their company and created a welcoming environment that put those around them in a receptive psychological mindset. Gentleness and kindness drew people closer to the prophets who greeted everyone with the kind of warm reception that is often reserved for the wealthy and powerful.

Those who interacted with the prophets were encouraged, reassured that they could overcome obstacles, and praised for their effort. The prophets' humility and modesty removed psychological barriers of inferiority from people's minds and made them more confident in their ability to learn and progress.

People could relate to the prophets' humanity and their shared weaknesses and emotions. They saw how these men received God's support in their times of need, how He corrected them when they erred, and how they accepted that correction with grace. This made people more receptive to the message, and to the prophets as its carriers, since people saw them as role models they could look up to and learn from.

Warmth in Reception

A warm reception endears people to listen and learn, and opens their minds to receive instruction. It is not always necessary that the warmth be directed toward the student to be effective; in many cases it is simply enough for a student to observe that warmth and associate it with the teacher's character. This is evidenced in the *Hebrew Bible* when Moses' welcoming behavior toward his father-in-law was noted and recorded in the Scripture:

> So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent.—EXODUS, 18: 7

We see a similar example when Aaron greets Moses:

> The Lord said to Aaron, "Go into the desert to see Moses." So, Aaron greeted Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him.—EXODUS, 18: 7

While it is not uncommon to witness the warm reception of family members, Jesus (*pbuh*) welcomed a throng of people who interrupted a private session with his Apostles:

> **10.** When the apostles returned, they told Jesus everything they had done. Then he took them with him and they

withdrew privately to a town called Bethsaida.

11. But when the crowds found out, they followed him. He welcomed them, spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and cured those who needed healing.

12. Now the day began to draw to a close, so the twelve came and said to Jesus: "Send the crowd away, so they can go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and food, because we are in an isolated place."

13. But he said to them, "You give them something to eat ..."—LUKE 9:10-13

This passage goes on to describe a miraculous event but, for our purpose, it is important to study his behavior before the miracle occurred. Despite being interrupted while trying to enter a private setting, Jesus (*pbuh*) graciously welcomed the crowd, proceeded to teach them, and then invited them to share the little food that he and his Apostles had; possibly conveying an even deeper lesson in showing his Apostles how to be teachers and the importance of welcoming those seeking knowledge.

In a similar example to that of Jesus, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) interrupted his sermon to welcome a stranger who came seeking knowledge. The stranger, Abi Rafa'ah, later narrated his experience:

> I came over to Muḥammad (*pbuh*) while he was preaching and said: "I am a stranger who came to ask about his religion, I am he who does not know his religion." The Prophet left his sermon and came close to me and pulled up a chair with metal legs and sat. He then started teaching me from what God taught him; then he went

back to his sermon and completed it.—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #876

Another such incident occurred when a group from Yemen came to him, at which time he said:

> "People from Yemen have come to us; they are soft hearted and gentle natured—faith is Yemeni and wisdom is Yemeni."—ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ, #4390

This compliment went far beyond simply welcoming a group of travelers. With it, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) focused his people's attention on empathetic qualities in the Yemeni travelers that were often not prioritized in a patently tribal society that was rather harsh and generally inclined to distrust outsiders. He endeared them to his people and gave them a reason to not only welcome the outsiders, but to learn from them and seek to emulate that which their own society was often lacking.

Humility in Behavior

Humility removes barriers between the teacher and student and creates a welcoming educational environment that facilitates learning. A good teacher listens to his students' concerns and responds humbly and constructively. This enables students to realize that they are partners in the learning process instead of passive recipients, and helps avoid a combative learning environment.

Moses (*pbuh*) exemplified a teacher who responded with humility in a tense situation:

> **3.** They came as a group to speak against Moses and Aaron and said, "You have gone too far. All the people are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. So

why do you put yourselves above all the people of the Lord?"

4. When Moses heard this, he bowed facedown.

5. Then he said to Korah and all his followers: "Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who belongs to Him. He will bring the one who is holy near to Him; He will bring to Himself the person He chooses."—NUMBERS, 16: 3-5

Instead of responding harshly or defending himself and his brother, Moses (*pbuh*) bowed to the ground and left his defense in God's hands. His reaction diffused the situation and demonstrated that he was but a messenger and servant who felt no arrogance because of his position. While this is an extreme example, teachers who apply this lesson may be able to draw in students who challenge them by deflecting the conflict and drawing the focus back to the goal of learning.

The New Testament contains several examples of Jesus (*pbuh*) extolling humbleness and calling himself a humble servant:

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."—MATTHEW 11:29 and

26. "But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.

27. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."—LUKE 22:26-27

In these passages, Jesus (*pbuh*) not only identifies himself as a

humble person, but specifically instructs the people to prefer a role of servitude over one of mastery. Like any good teacher, he first led by example and then encouraged others to follow.

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) was sent to lead his people, yet God also commanded him to be humble:

> *Lower your wing to those who have followed you among the faithful.*—ASH-SHUARAA', 26: 215

Anas ibn Malik describes how Muḥammad (*pbuh*) exemplified this internal humility:

> "A young slave girl used to take the hand of the Prophet and he would not pull it away until he had fully attended to her need, anywhere she needed his help in Medina."—RIYĀḌ AṢ-ṢĀLIḤĪN, #604

Although it is often easy to forget, the role of teachers is to serve their students and thereby it holds great esteem and great responsibility. Humility allows a teacher to become more relatable, and bridges the teacher-student gap. It sets the stage for constructive interactions, and fosters open-mindedness and affection. The examples above show that the prophets were sincere in their actions, were truly humble, and had real empathy, love, and respect toward other people regardless of their station in society.

Encouragement and Praise

Encouragement helps students overcome psychological barriers that may hinder their progress, and creates a positive relationship with the teacher. An example of this concept is seen in the *Hebrew Bible*, when Moses (*pbuh*) encourages the Children of Israel:

> "Be strong and courageous! Do not fear or tremble before them, for the Lord your God is the one who is going with you. He will not fail you or abandon you!"—DEUTERONOMY, 31 :6

When his disciples despaired of being forgiven and of entering Paradise, Jesus (*pbuh*) encouraged them:

> **27.** Jesus looked at them carefully and said, "It's impossible with human beings, but not with God. All things are possible for God."—MARK 10:27

Encouragement directed toward achieving goals is a very important aspect of developing a student's learning behavior. In the two passages above, we see Prophets Moses and Jesus (*pbut*) encouraging their people toward specific goals when they are struggling to remain optimistic. In some cases, encouragement functions less as motivation toward a goal than as an alleviation of concern.

Anas related that Muḥammad (*pbuh*) visited a young man who was dying and asked him how he was feeling.

> He replied: "I am hopeful in God and the messenger of God, but I am afraid of my sins," whereupon God's messenger said, "The two feelings cannot come together in a man's heart at such a time without God giving him what he hopes for and granting him security from what he fears."—MISHKĀT AL-MAṢĀBĪḤ, #1612

Another form of encouragement is praise, which can be given with a specific goal in mind or simply to bolster students' confidence and recognize their effort. For example, when Muḥammad (*pbuh*) heard Abu Musa al-Ashʿari reciting the

Qur'an in a beautiful way, he commented:

> "If only you had seen me listening to your recitation yesterday! You have been given the melodious voice of the House of David."—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #793E : BOOK 6, #280

The need for encouragement is rooted in human nature and is one that all people seek to fulfill. The prophets were not immune to this necessity, and we can see how God encouraged them when they faced difficulties. When Moses (*pbuh*) first received the directive to confront Pharaoh, he sought comfort from God and was given the following answer:

> **14.** And He said, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest."—EXODUS, 33: 14

God encouraged Jesus (*pbuh*) in his path and future:

> *And God said, "O Jesus, indeed I will take you and raise you unto Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve and make those who have followed you superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me is your return, and I will judge between you all concerning that in which you differed."*—AAL-IMRAN, 3: 55

In the following verses, God encourages Muḥammad (*pbuh*) and reminds him that previous messengers were also tested and demoralized by their people's rejection:

> *"We assuredly know that it saddens you what they say; indeed, they do not belie you, rather the oppressors reject the clear signs of God.*
>
> *And assuredly there were messengers who were belied before you, but they were patient with the belying and harm*

> *until Our victory came to them, and none can alter the decree of God; and assuredly you have received news about those messengers."*—AL-ANAAM, 6: 33-34

In all three examples we see the prophets receiving different forms of encouragement. Moses (*pbuh*) received encouragement that he was not alone when he was feeling insecure. Reassuring students that the teacher is on their side and will be with them through their hardships can calm them and refocus them on the task at hand. God encouraged Jesus (*pbuh*) by telling him that he had accomplished what he set out to do and that his efforts had not been in vain. Encouraging students after the fact helps motivate them to keep improving. Muḥammad (*pbuh*) was given encouragement through the legacy of previous prophets who had also endured hardship. Recognizing students' struggles, and relating them to those who have overcome similar hardship, validates their concern and encourages them to keep striving toward their goals.

Gentleness and Mercy in Interaction

In addition to offering encouragement and praise, the prophets exhibited gentleness and mercy in their everyday interactions. The *Hebrew Bible* tells us that Moses (*pbuh*) was a forbearing and meek man:

> Now the man Moses was very meek (gentle, kind, and humble) above all the men on the face of the earth.—NUMBERS, 12: 3

In fact, God specifically enjoined both him and Aaron to be gentle during their discourse with Pharaoh:

> *"Go, you and your brother, with my signs and do not wane in my remembrance. Go to Pharaoh, he has transgressed. Then speak to him gently, perhaps he will remember or have awe (of Me)."*—TA HA, 20: 42-44

Being gentle is one of the most important characteristics of a successful teacher, a characteristic embodied by Jesus (*pbuh*) as described in the New Testament:

> Say to the city of Zion, "See, your king comes to you. He is gentle and riding on a donkey. He is riding on a donkey's colt."—MATTHEW, 21: 5

It is powerful to realize that this was how Jesus (*pbuh*) instructed others to introduce him. He chose to highlight his gentleness and simplicity, thereby letting those who did not know him understand that he was approachable and would not be harsh in his interaction with them.

God defines Muḥammad's prophethood as follows:

> *"We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds."*—AL-ANBIYAA', 21: 107

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) manifested this honor by prefacing his words and instructions with gentle phrases, and instructing others to do the same. He stressed the importance of this characteristic to his wife Aisha:

> "O Aisha, God is gentle and He loves gentleness. He rewards for gentleness that which He does not reward for harshness, and He rewards nothing else with the like of it."—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #2593, BOOK 45, #99

Like all soft skills, gentleness and mercy are important

characteristics that teachers should build and nurture because they take time to become part of the teacher's personality. As seen in the previous passages, gentleness was an integral part of the prophets' daily interactions and a characteristic they highly valued.

Kindness in Correcting Mistakes

One iteration of the prophets' gentleness is expressed in how they corrected people's mistakes. Being kind while correcting others is particularly important, since it is often a sensitive situation for both parties; the teacher faces frustration and the student may feel demeaned and act defensively. Jesus (*pbuh*) established a clear process that a faithful person should take in such situations:

> **15.** "Now if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.
>
> **16.** But if he does not listen, then take with you one or two others, that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every word may be established.
>
> **17.** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."—MATTHEW, 18: 15-17

It is important to note that the last resort in this process is to correct a mistake in a public setting after giving an individual every chance to do so in private. Being kind while correcting others is key to a successful rectification process so that students may seek to follow the right way on their own. Muḥammad (*pbuh*) exemplified this by addressing his companions and

demonstrating how they should behave in the following situation:

> A Bedouin stood up and urinated in the mosque. The people grabbed him but the Prophet ordered them to leave him and to pour a bucket or a tumbler of water over the place where the urine was. The Prophet then said to them, "We have been sent to make things easy and not to make them difficult."] He then went on to address the Bedouin, saying: ["Mosques are not places meant for urine and filth, but are for the remembrance of God, prayer, and the recitation of the Qur'an…"—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #285, BOOK 2 #127

Even in such a shocking situation, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) prohibited his companions from harming the man or making him feel bad. Instead, he taught them the value of being patient and forbearing when dealing with other's mistakes, especially those borne out of ignorance. While students are expected to make mistakes, handling them in a kind way is an indicator of the teacher's strength of character and elevated manners.

Recognizing Faults

Another indication of a teacher's strength of character is the ability to recognize their own faults or shortcomings. While the prophets were of elevated character, they were human and thus subject to human feelings, actions, and sometimes mistakes. In these cases, God would correct, guide, and support the prophets as necessary. These interventions served to educate the prophets, those around them, and students throughout history.

Such was the case of Moses (*pbuh*) when he went to meet God. In his absence, his followers fashioned a golden calf and

worshipped it. God corrected him for that in the *Hebrew Bible*:

> **12.** Then the Lord said to me, "Arise, go down from here quickly, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They are quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made a molded image for themselves."—DEUTERONOMY, 9: 12

Consequently, Moses (*pbuh*) went back quickly to rectify his people's corruption, feeling the burden of his mistake in rushing to meet God and leaving his people behind.

There was a time when Muḥammad (*pbuh*) was addressing a group of tribal leaders with the hope that one of them might listen to his message. Because he was focused on them, he turned away from a blind man who interrupted his conversation to ask a question. God sent him a reminder of the incident, followed by an admonition for ignoring a man who was truly interested, and focusing instead on those who were disinterested in what he had to say:

> **1.** *He frowned and turned away,*
>
> **2.** *when he was approached by the blind man.*
>
> **3.** *But don't you realize (O Prophet), that perhaps he will advance?*
>
> **4.** *Or be reminded, and the reminder might benefit him?*
>
> **5.** *As for the one who was disinterested,*
>
> **6.** *him, you pursued.*
>
> **7.** *Yet it is not upon you should he not advance.*
>
> **8.** *And as for the one who came to you in earnest,*

9. *with awe (of God),*

10. *From him, you were distracted.*

11. *Nay! Assuredly, this is a reminder.*—ABASA, 80: 2-11

Jesus (*pbuh*) emphasized the need to admit mistakes and instructed his followers to ask God for forgiveness:

2. Jesus said to them, "When you pray, this is what you should say. 'Father, may your name be honored. May your kingdom come.

3. Give us each day our daily bread.

4. Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. Keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted'."—LUKE, 11: 2-4

Similarly, in the Qur'an, God instructs the faithful to ask for His mercy and forgiveness:

"Our Lord, reproach us not if we forget or err. Our Lord, put not upon us a weight as You put upon the ones before us. Our Lord, burden us not with what we have no tolerance for, and absolve us, and forgive us, and mercy us. You are our trustee, so champion us over those who reject."—AL-BAQARAH, 2: 286

Those teachers who wish to follow in the prophets' footsteps must admit to themselves that they may stumble, and the best course of action when they do is to take responsibility and amend their error. When teachers acknowledge and rectify their mistakes, they set an example that encourages their students to emulate such behavior.

It is clear from the many accounts of these three traditions that the people around the prophets paid close attention to their character, noted the smallest details, and thought them important enough to record. The prophets' manners and characters were among the most important factors that attracted people to them. In fact, their behavior inspired people to view them as role models to emulate, trust, and learn from.

Because the prophets demonstrated good character and fine manners before their prophethood, people trusted the authenticity of their message. Because they never deviated from their fine manners throughout their prophethood, people were encouraged to embrace their message. And because they were exemplary models of human behavior, people sought to emulate them rather than set them apart as monarchs.

CHAPTER THREE

Non-verbal Communication in Teaching

> "Nonverbal communication is an elaborate secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all."
>
> —EDWARD SAPIR

Non-verbal communication accounts for a significant portion of innate human expression.[1] It can be conscious or subconscious and includes any act, tone, expression, or other non-verbal message designed to communicate one's feelings and give deeper meaning to what is being said. It can also be used to influence one's thinking, draw attention, or stir interest to ensure the proper delivery of a message. While non-verbal communication is impactful by itself, combining it with verbal instruction and practical role modeling creates a powerful

[1] The result of two studies from 1967 (Mehrabian & Wiener and Mehrabian & Ferris) found that 55% of communication is nonverbal, 38% is tone of voice, and 7% is communicated by words only.

collective experience.

Since the prophets (*pbut*) lived that which they taught, a great deal of non-verbal teaching occurred as people saw how they incorporated their message in their daily lives. Since their message focused on character-building and behavioral adjustment, we find it particularly important to pay close attention to role-modeling in the context of non-verbal teaching.

Role Modeling

Teachers inherently act as role models, teaching their students via both words and actions. The prophets (*pbut*) utilized a variety of edification methods to reshape the individual's character, nurture knowledge, and elevate spiritual and moral values. Their most significant non-verbal method was the practical implementation of their teachings through role modeling. By being the first to implement the Divine instructions they received, they enabled people to see the teachings in action. Those surrounding a loved and respected teacher are inspired to behave and act similarly, which promotes a powerful learner-driven edification process.

In many situations, Moses (*pbuh*) chose role modeling and teaching by example over verbal instruction. Rather than explaining, he would simply do what was supposed to be done so that everyone could learn how to handle similar situations. Take, for example, how Moses (*pbuh*) demonstrated self-control and confidence while escaping from Pharoah and his army:

60. *So they pursued them at sunrise.*

61. *And when the two companies were within view, the companions of Moses said, "Assuredly we will be caught!"*

62. *He said, "Nay! Assuredly my Lord is with me, He will guide me."*

63. *Then We inspired to Moses, "Strike the sea with your staff," and it parted, and each section was like a great towering mountain.*—ASH-SHUARAA', 26: 60-63

Instead of blaming his people or chastising them for panicking, Moses (*pbuh*) chose to show them his confidence in a positive outcome and acted based on that confidence.

And again, displaying faith and patience, Prophets Moses and Aaron (*pbut*) handled another stressful situation that occurred while they and their people were enduring in the desert:

2. There was no water for the people, so they came together against Moses and Aaron.

3. They argued with Moses and said, "We should have died in front of the Lord as our brothers did.

4. Why did you bring the Lord's people into this desert? Are we and our animals to die here?

5. Why did you bring us from Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain, figs, grapevines, or pomegranates, and there's no water to drink!"

6. So Moses and Aaron left the people and went to the entrance of the meeting tent. There they bowed facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them.

7. The Lord said to Moses,

8. "Take your walking stick, and you and your brother Aaron should gather the people. Speak to that rock in

> front of them; water will flow from it. When you bring the water out from that rock, give it to the people and their animals."—NUMBERS, 20: 2-8

Rather than panicking or complaining, Moses (*pbuh*) showed his people how to internalize the situation and find the most appropriate way to solve the problem. He turned to God, the One who directed him to take the Children of Israel to the desert and always provided for them in their times of need. Prophets Moses and Aaron prostrated with their heads on the ground, showing their people that humility and prayer is the way to handle stressful situations rather than complaint. Their action not only showed how to handle the situation but also brought forth the solution, reinforcing the concept that the correct approach will result in the desired outcome.

In the following passage, Jesus (*pbuh*) displayed poise when confronted with ridicule from belligerent members of the community:

> **13.** "No servant can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."
>
> **14.** The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and scoffing at him.
>
> **15.** And he told them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the sight of others, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly admired by people is revolting in God's sight."—LUKE, 16: 13-15

Also, describing Jesus (*pbuh*):

> **22.** He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth;
>
> **23.** when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the One who judges justly.—1 PETER, 2: 22-23

Jesus (*pbuh*) demonstrated to his followers (and to us all) how to reply to mockery—with a calm and collected demeanor instead of with aggression or frustration. Instead of lowering himself to their level, he maintained his dignity and remained steadfast in his message.

In another instance, Jesus (*pbuh*) waited until his disciples had fully experienced his actions before explaining the significance behind them:

> **4.** So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself.
>
> **5.** Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him.—JOHN 13:4-5

When their surprise had abated, he explained:

> **12.** So when he had washed their feet, and put on his outer garments, and sat down again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?
>
> **13.** You call me 'Teacher' and 'Master'—and rightly you say, for I am.
>
> **14.** If I then, your master and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

15. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done."—JOHN, 13: 12-15

There are several lessons here; first, Jesus (*pbuh*) was clearly cognizant of the fact that simply telling his disciples to love and care for each other in a humble way would have been much less impactful, for actions speak louder than words. Second, he wanted his disciples to learn that sometimes one must accept the circumstance as it exists before understanding its context and significance. In other words, a teacher does not always have to preface a lesson with an explanation. Sometimes, observing without preexisting knowledge will peak students' curiosity and force them to analyze and form their own thoughts about an experience. And third, Jesus (*pbuh*) demonstrated that teachers are neither above nor below the student, rather they are facilitators who should humble themselves and teach by doing.

The Qur'an affirms the value of role modeling in the teaching and learning processes and stresses the preservation and observation of the legacy of previous prophets. God commanded Muḥammad (*pbuh*) to take his predecessors as role models to attain guidance, saying about them:

Those are the ones that God guided; thus, you should emulate their guidance.—AL-ANAAM, 6: 90

And later, when his message became established, God commanded the faithful to take Prophet Muḥammad as a role model and fine example:

Assuredly, there has been for you in God's messenger an excellent model for anyone whose hope is in God and the Last Day, and remembers God often.—AL-AHZAB, 33: 21

In fact, one of the main drivers that led his companions to embrace Muḥammad's message was their observation of his conduct and character. When forced to tell the truth, even his enemies could only praise his upstanding character. Abu Sufyan, an ardent enemy of Muḥammad (*pbuh*) at the time, narrated this account after his interaction with the Roman king Heraclius:

> … Heraclius called us to his court and had all the senior Roman dignitaries around him. He called for his translator and asked, "Who amongst you is most closely related to the man who claims to be a Prophet?" Abu Sufyan replied, "I am the nearest relative in this group to him."
>
> Heraclius said, "Bring him close to me and make his companions stand behind him." Abu Sufyan said, "Heraclius told his translator to tell my companions that he wanted to ask me questions regarding that man (the Prophet) and that if I told a lie my companions should contradict me." Abu Sufyan added, "By God, had I not been afraid of my companions labeling me a liar, I would not have spoken the truth about the Prophet."
>
> The first question Heraclius asked me was, "What is his family status amongst you?" I replied, "He belongs to a well-respected family amongst us." Heraclius further asked, "Has anyone amongst you ever claimed the same (i.e. to be a Prophet) before him?" I replied, "No." He said, "Was anyone amongst his ancestors a king?" I replied, "No." Heraclius asked, "Do the nobles or the poor follow him?" I replied, "It is the poor who follow him."
>
> He asked, "Are his followers increasing or decreasing (day

by day)?" I replied, "They are increasing." He then asked, "Has anyone amongst those who embrace his religion become displeased and renounced the religion afterwards?" I replied, "No." Heraclius said, "Have you ever accused him of telling lies before his claim?" I replied, "No." Heraclius said, "Does he break his promises?" I replied, "No. We have a truce with him but we do not know what he will do in keeping it." I could not find an opportunity to say anything against him except that.

Heraclius asked, "Have you ever gone to war with him?" I replied, "Yes." Then he said, "What was the outcome of the battles?" I replied, "Sometimes he was victorious and sometimes we were." Heraclius said, "What does he order you to do?" I said, "He tells us to worship God, and God alone, and not to worship anything beside Him, and to renounce that which our ancestors have said. He orders us to pray, to speak the truth, to be chaste, and to keep good relations with our kin."

Heraclius asked the translator to convey to me the following: "I asked you about his family and your reply was that he belonged to a well-respected family. Indeed, all prophets come from well-respected families amongst their peoples. I questioned you as to whether anyone else amongst you claimed such a thing before, and your reply was 'No.' If the answer had been 'Yes', I would have thought that this man was following the previous man's claim.

Then I asked you whether anyone from his ancestors was a king. You replied 'No;' and if you had said 'Yes,' I would

have thought that this man wanted to take back his ancestral kingdom. I further asked whether he was ever accused of telling lies and you replied 'No.' So, I wondered how a person who does not tell a lie about others could ever tell a lie about God.

I then asked you whether the rich people followed him or the poor. You replied that it was the poor who followed him. And indeed, all prophets have been followed by this very class of people. Then I asked you whether his followers were increasing or decreasing. You replied that they were increasing. And indeed, this is the way of true faith until it is complete in all respects.

I further asked you whether there was anybody, who, after embracing his religion, became displeased and discarded his religion. You replied 'No', and indeed this is the sign of true faith, when its delight enters the heart. I asked you whether he had ever betrayed anyone. You replied 'No,' and likewise prophets never betray.

Then I asked you what he ordered you to do. You replied that he ordered you to worship God, and God alone, and not to worship anything beside Him and forbade you to worship idols and ordered you to pray, to speak the truth and to be chaste. If what you have said is true, he will very soon occupy this place underneath my feet and I knew from the scriptures that he would appear, but I did not know that he would be from among your people, and if I could reach him, I would go immediately to meet him and if I were with him, I would certainly wash his feet."—ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ, #7

Teaching through role modeling not only passes on knowledge to learners, but also shows them how to pass on knowledge as well. Additionally, it allows students to watch how something is done. The significance of this cannot be overstated, for students benefit from non-verbal minutia that cannot be addressed by verbal instruction.

Body Language

Combining verbal instruction with purposeful and meaningful body language creates a mental image in the recipient's mind, one that not only increases the chance of it being retained, but also facilitates better understanding.

Body posture can be used to great effect when teaching, and the demeanor of Jesus (*pbuh*) in the following comparison shows that even subtle differences in posture can signal very different mindset. Among sinners and wrongdoers, he taught in an informal environment with an informal posture:

> **10.** And as Jesus reclined at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.—MATTHEW, 9: 10

In contrast, speaking with his followers, he adopted a different posture since they were eager participants and his teachings to them were formal and more advanced:

> **1.** When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the hillside, and sat down. His disciples came to him.
>
> **2.** He took a deep breath, and began his teaching.—MATTHEW, 5: 1-2

In the first example, he was not speaking to a crowd of eager students but to people who were hesitant and needed to be put at ease. However, when he addressed his followers, he took a deep breath and adopted a posture that formalized the setting and clearly signaled the start of his lesson.

The following events shows that a subtle change in posture can emphasize what is being said and cause the student to remember it:

> Prophet Muḥammad said: "Should I tell you about the greatest of sins? They are three." They said: "Yes, O messenger of God." He said: "Associating anything next to God, being undutiful towards one's parents …" and he was leaning on a pillow so he sat up and said: "… and assuredly, bearing false testimony." And he kept repeating it until we wished within ourselves that he would stop.—
> ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ, #2654

The change in the prophet's posture alerted the listeners to pay special attention to the point that was about to follow and its importance.

The prophets also used gestures to signal importance or demonstrate a specific idea. In one such instance, Jesus (*pbuh*) emphasized his words by stretching out his hand to encompass all the faithful as his family:

> **47.** Someone said to him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to you."
>
> **48.** Jesus answered the one who was speaking to him and said, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?"

> **49.** And stretching out his hand out toward his disciples, he said, "See my mother and my brothers!
>
> **50.** For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."—MATTHEW, 12: 47-50

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) gave a visual demonstration of spoken words in many instances, such as when he said:

> "The faithful to the faithful are like building blocks reinforcing one another," then he interlocked the fingers of his two hands.—ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ, #481

Interlocking his fingers allowed the listeners to "see" the unity and cooperation that should be present between the faithful and reinforced that idea. In another narrated incident, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) said:

> "I and the sponsor of an orphan will be in Heaven like this," and he held up his index and middle fingers together.—ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ, #6005

While he could have just said that the sponsor of the orphan would be close to him in Heaven, the gesture communicated the extreme closeness between the Prophet's high position and that of the sponsor of the orphan.

Gestures can also be used to emphasize a point with very few words. Sufyan, one of the Muḥammad 's companions, relates the following:

> I said: "O Messenger of God, advise me with something that I should hold onto." He said: "Say God is my Lord, then be upstanding." I said: "O messenger of God, what

> do you worry about most for me?" The Prophet grabbed his own tongue, then said: "This!"—SUNAN IBN MAJAH, #3972

In this instance, using a gesture instead of words greatly magnified his answer's effect. Even when reading the account, it is possible to not only imagine the scene but also to feel the import of watching one's tongue as a daily practice.

As we see, the prophets embarked on the task of teaching and guiding people by living their own message, thus becoming role models for those around them and future generations as well. They utilized body language to grab the listener's attention and create a mental image that bolstered understanding and retention of their verbal instruction. Such non-verbal teaching elements were so effective that their disciples included them as part of the message in a way that gives today's students not only facts, but insight into the prophets' personalities as well.

CHAPTER FOUR

Segmentation of Instruction

"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible;
and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

— Francis of Assisi

One way to ensure that students receive information properly is for the teacher to divide instructions in an incrementally progressive manner so the recipient can gradually absorb and retain the message. While this is a standard practice in contemporary classrooms, it was also the method used by Prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad (*pbut*) centuries ago.

Since the prophets were conveyers of the Divine message, the laws and instructions within it were revealed according to God's decree. As with any well-assembled curriculum, instruction was apportioned in a way that was manageable for its recipients to understand and enact. God reminds us in the Qur'an:

> *God does not ask of any soul except its ability; unto each is what it has earned and upon each is what it has acquired.*
> —Al-Baqarah, 2: 286

These Divine instructions were segmented by God, revealed at intervals of His choosing. The prophets delivered the Divine message as revealed, and in the portions received. However, they utilized the discretion they were given to present the information in a way that would beget proper reception and observance by their people. By recognizing the benefit of gradual instruction, the prophets were able to exercise their judgement in tailoring their delivery to meet the needs of a given situation.

Moses (*pbuh*) was dispatched to guide his people and lead them out of Pharaoh's tyranny. His initial instructions were to renew their faith in God and embrace the religious tradition inherited from their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (*pbut*). The Qur'an relates that he commanded them to begin observing their religion while still in Egypt, under the oppressive rulership of Pharoah:

> *And We inspired unto Moses and his brother, "Take lodging for your people in Egypt; and make in your houses a qiblah (prayer direction) and establish prayer; and give good tidings to the faithful."*—YOUNUS, 10: 87

In the *Hebrew Bible*, following their escape from Egypt, Moses (*pbuh*) relays specific Divine instructions that renewed his people's trust in God as the second stage in their spiritual preparation:

> **11.** The Lord said to Moses,
>
> **12.** "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them: 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread.' Then you will know that I am the Lord your God."

13. That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

14. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.

15. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.

16. This is what the Lord has commanded: Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an *omer* (a unit of measurement) for each person you have in your tent."

17. The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little.

18. And when they measured it by the *omer*, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed.

19. Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning."

20. However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So, Moses was angry with them.

21. Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away.

22. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two *omers* for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses.

23. He said to them, "This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. So, bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning."

24. So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it.

25. "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today.

26. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any."—EXODUS, 16: 11-26

The Children of Israel were first asked to reconnect with their religious roots before they went through the ordeal of life in the desert. While some may see that ordeal as only hardship, others will notice that not only were they physically liberated from Pharaoh's tyranny, but they were also spiritually liberated from materialistic trappings. The scarcity of food and limited ability to keep or preserve goods forced them to refocus on their direct dependence and relationship with God. This complete reset prepared them to be more physically and spiritually committed to the next stage of the message, a comprehensive set of Divine laws as outlined in Exodus, 21-Exodus, 30.

In an educational setting, this would be reflected in foundational learning when a teacher identifies basic core concepts necessary to advance and uses them as building blocks to lay a solid foundation and prepare students for the next stage. Sometimes, as was the case with the Children of Israel, it is

necessary to first purge misinformation or poor learning habits before building on their knowledge.

In Jesus (*pbuh*), we see how teachers might apply this process to themselves, as well as their students. Like Moses, Jesus (*pbuh*) was sent to the descendants of the Children of Israel, who had strayed from the message of Moses (*pbuh*). Tasked with rebuilding their faith and correcting deviations and misunderstandings, Jesus (*pbuh*) first had to learn the religious laws before educating his people. He began by applying foundational learning to himself, gathering the cornerstones of his knowledge and building upon them before teaching the same steps to those he was instructed to lead. In one such example, we see him doing so even at a young age:

> **42.** When he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.
>
> **43.** When the days of the feast were complete; as they returned, the child Jesus (*pbuh*) remained behind in Jerusalem and Joseph and his mother did not know of it.
>
> **44.** But supposing him to be in their company, they went a day's journey. Then they searched for him among their relatives and acquaintances.
>
> **45.** When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.
>
> **46.** After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

47. All who heard him were astonished at his understanding and his answers.—LUKE, 2: 42-47

Even as he learned, he began disseminating the knowledge he had acquired, growing within the community as both a student and a teacher:

37. Each day Jesus taught at the temple. And each evening he went to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives.

38. All the people came to the temple early in the morning. They wanted to hear Jesus speak—LUKE, 21: 37-38.

The years he spent among both scholars and the people at large lent strength to his position as a pillar of the community. The strong ties he built through his keen intellect and good character allowed him to solidify his role as one who gave good counsel. As he achieved great knowledge and credibility, he went beyond teaching to correcting deviations:

45. Then Jesus entered the temple courtyard. He began to drive out those who were selling there.

46. He told them, "It is written that the Lord said, 'My house will be a house where people can pray.' But you have made it a den for robbers."—LUKE, 19: 45-46

The Qur'an reveals a similar example:

And when Jesus came with clear signs he said, "I have come to you with wisdom, and to make clear to you some of that whereon you disagree; so, revere God and obey me."—AZ-ZUKHRUF, 43: 63

Knowing that his message was to refocus his people's priorities and purpose, and to teach them the true essence of the religious laws they had grown up with, Jesus (*pbuh*) had to adjust their understanding of their existing religious tradition:

> **10.** He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.
>
> **11.** And there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years and was bent over and could not straighten herself up.
>
> **12.** When Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity."
>
> **13.** Then he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight and glorified God.
>
> **14.** But the leader of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, and said to the people, "There are six days in which men ought to work. Therefore, come and be healed on those days, but not on the Sabbath day."
>
> **15.** Jesus answered him, "You hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead it away to water it?"—LUKE, 13: 10-15

Jesus (*pbuh*) found his people following the letter of the law while having lost sight of its spirit. This practical application succinctly conveyed the concept he was tasked with imparting. Just as in the case with Moses, Jesus (*pbuh*) taught his people in stages beginning with foundational teaching, then correcting their deviations and erroneously formed notions, and, finally, teaching

them the importance of observing the spirit of the law not just the letter.

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) brought the Divine message to people of polytheistic inclinations, and thus had to introduce completely new concepts that were, in many cases, in direct conflict to their customs. They were not raised in an environment of monotheism, predisposed to acts of worship, or accustomed to following Divine rules that governed their lives. In fact, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) spent the first twelve years of his prophethood primarily calling his people to simply accept the concept of monotheism, unadulterated by associates or partners to God.

Most instruction related to specific acts of worship, moral business practices, and social regulations were revealed in the latter half of his prophethood. Even then, many instructions were revealed in a series of progressive steps in order to successfully shift expectations to a higher standard. A perfect example is the gradual prohibition on drinking alcohol, a practice that was prevalent among the people of the desert, and specifically those in Mecca.

The first revelation in this regard was:

> *They ask you about inebriants and gambling, say: "In them are both great harm and benefit for people, and their harm is greater than their benefit …"*—AL-BAQARAH, 2: 219

This gave those with stronger faith and resolve a chance to choose the better path and introduced the concept that drinking such intoxicants harms a society, when many people believed that this was not the case.

The next revelation escalated the severity of the admonition:

> *"O you who are faithful, do not come near to the prayer while you are inebriated until you know what you are saying …"*—AN-NISAA', 4: 43

This second step prohibited the faithful from praying while intoxicated. With this new standard, people were not allowed to engage in ritual prayers while unmindful of what they were saying due to inebriation. Since Muslims are obligated to pray five times a day at set times, this severely limited the time intervals in which one could consume alcohol and recover from its effects before having to perform the next prayer.

Finally, alcohol was prohibited altogether:

> *O you who have faith: indeed, inebriants, gambling, pagan alter offerings, and arrow divining are filth from the work of Satan, so avoid them (so that) perhaps you might succeed.*—AL-MA'IDAH, 5: 90

This incremental application of a law that affected all of society eased a difficult transition and enabled the people to adhere to it when they may not have otherwise.

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) understood the importance of prioritizing and segmenting information to ensure understanding and observance. When a teacher properly implements segmentation, it encourages the students to apply new concepts without becoming overwhelmed, frustrated, or abandoning the course of instruction altogether. With that in mind, he instructed Mu'adh, his emissary to Yemen, with the following words:

"You are going to a People of the Book, so call them to

> testify that there is no god except God and that Muḥammad is His slave and messenger; and if they accept this, then tell them that God has enjoined upon them five prayers per day; and if they accept it, then tell them that God has made the payment of charity obligatory upon them. It should be collected from their rich and distributed among their poor; and if they agree to it, don't take it from the best of their assets..."—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #19A, BOOK 1, #27

The Prophet first addressed core belief, the primary element of faith, which is profound yet easy to observe once settled in the mind and heart. The next element he addressed was prayer, the secondary element of faith, which takes continual effort and commitment to create a regular daily connection with God. Muḥammad (*pbuh*) wanted to first ensure that people had enough faith in their hearts to perform their prayers on a daily basis. That level of engagement would facilitate the commitment needed for charity, which is often one of the most difficult acts to embrace as people love their wealth and may find it hard to part with.

It is important to note two things related to the command for charity. First, that the wealth was taken from *their* rich and distributed to *their* poor. In other words, wealth was not taken to benefit a king or ruling class, or taken out of their community altogether but it stayed in the community and benefitted everyone. Second, the Prophet ordered his representative to avoid taking from the best of their wealth, which might have left them internally disgruntled. In addition to demonstrating the process of segmented instruction, this incident also examines another important characteristic of teaching: attention to detail.

The prophets (*pbuh*) recognized that teaching in incremental progressive steps ensures proper comprehension and implementtation by their students, as one step prepares the student for the next.

The incremental transmission of God's law demonstrated the prophets' understanding of their primary role as teachers. They were invested in ensuring that students fully understood the topic, which is the key difference between a teacher and a speaker who is only concerned with presenting information. The prophets walked their followers through each step toward the ultimate goal: making sure they *understood and embraced* the Divine message.

CHAPTER FIVE

Recipient-centered Teaching

"The beauty of personalized learning is that even the smallest changes can make the biggest difference."

—Pernille Ripp, 7th Grade Teacher

Students differ in their ability, level of understanding, and need. They also differ in their level of enthusiasm and interest in learning, and while some are naturally eager to absorb knowledge, others require more effort to engage in learning. Teachers who devise methods that take into account as many of these factors as possible ensure that students are more receptive to learning.

Although God provided the prophets with guidance, they were responsible for understanding and communicating with their people. Recognizing individual differences, the prophets tailored the teaching process to ensure maximum understanding and retention. Teachers today would do well to consider such individualization, as well as recognizing the value of choosing appropriate venues and utilizing available educational

opportunities. Progressive teachers often make use of outside events and situations to create corresponding learning experiences for their students. Such an approach ties instruction to a given event or situation, thereby creating a more easily understood and memorable learning experience.

Individualized Delivery

The prophets were instructed to convey their messages to people who differed in intellect, education, social status, physical need, moral character, gender, age, wealth, and level of enthusiasm for the message. They recognized that doing so might require grouping people into like-minded clusters and that sometimes this would include devising answers suitable to a recipient's specific situation.

Jesus (*pbuh*) utilized individualization as he responded to the same question from different people. When he was asked "What must I do to receive eternal life?" his responses reflected the nature of the individual he was addressing:

> **25.** One day an authority on the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to attain eternal life?"
>
> **26.** "What is written in the Law?" Jesus replied. "How do you understand it?"
>
> **27.** He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your strength and with all your mind. And, love your neighbor as you love yourself."

28. "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do that, and you will live."

29. But the man, wanting to make himself look good, asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30. Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Robbers attacked him, stripped off his clothes, and beat him. Then they went away, leaving him almost dead.

31. A priest happened to be going down that same road. When he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32. A Levite also came by. When he saw the man, he passed by on the other side too.

33. But a Samaritan came to the place where the man was and when he saw the man, he felt sorry for him.

34. He went to him, poured olive oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and he brought him to an inn and took care of him.

35. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the owner of the inn. 'Take care of him,' he said. 'When I return, I will pay you back for any extra expense you may have.'

36. "Which of the three do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by robbers?"

37. The authority on the law replied, "The one who felt sorry for him." Jesus told him, "Go and do as he did."—LUKE, 10: 25-37

… and again, Jesus (*pbuh*) was asked the same question by someone else:

> **18.** A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to attain eternal life?"
>
> **19.** Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good, except God alone.
>
> **20.** You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery; Do not murder; Do not steal; Do not bear false witness; Honor your father and your mother."
>
> **21.** He said, "All these I have kept since my youth."
>
> **22.** When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "Yet you lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me."
>
> **23.** When the ruler heard this, he became very sorrowful for he was very rich.
>
> **24.** When Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, he said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!
>
> **25.** For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."—LUKE, 18: 18-25

While the question itself is identical in both cases, it was asked by people of differing backgrounds and therefore garnered a different response. The first questioner was a man well versed in the canonical laws who sought to test Jesus. Jesus (*pbuh*) first directed him to state what he knew about the law. In answer to the

man's second question, Jesus (*pbuh*) gave a stark example to teach him the law's true spirit, thereby confronting the man's inclination to observe its letter and helping him understand the necessity of acting upon its spirit.

When dealing with the second person, who was a wealthy ruler, Jesus (*pbuh*) also began with the legal answer per the commandments. Upon finding that the ruler was already observing the laws, Jesus (*pbuh*) proceeded to teach him that the spirit of religious law is to always strive for self-improvement.

Realizing that each man had a different distraction, Jesus (*pbuh*) individualized his response based on where they needed to improve. The first man's distraction was pride in his scholarly knowledge, and so Jesus (*pbuh*) focused on the applied function of the law: serving people in the path of God. The second man, distracted by the material world despite following the commandments, needed to take that step of sacrifice and liberation. Jesus' answer required him to free himself from that which he loved in order to attain that which he sought.

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) addressed similar situations by giving different instructions based on personal factors.

In the first instance, Abu Hurairah narrated:

> The Prophet (*pbuh*) was asked, "Which action is the best?" He replied, "Having faith in God and His messenger." He was asked, "What comes next?" He replied, "Going to battle for the sake of God." Then he was asked, "What comes after that? He replied, "A righteous Hajj (pilgrimage)."—RIYĀḌ AṢ-ṢĀLIḤĪN, #1285

However, Abdullah bin ʻAmr bin al-ʻAas narrates the following:

> A young man came to the Prophet (*pbuh*) asking to join the troops in battle. The Prophet asked him, "Are your parents alive?" He replied "Yes." The Prophet said to him, "Then your battle is in their service."—Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī, #3004

Clearly, the instruction given must take into account an individual's specific situation. Going to battle to protect the community was a severe hardship, especially in a community that lacked resources and when many of those who went out did not expect to return. However, although certain individuals were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, they were told to redirect their effort to that which is more appropriate to their personal situation and therefore more beloved to God.

In another example, Abdullah ibn Amr related the following:

> A man asked the Prophet (*pbuh*), "Which act in Islam is best?" The Prophet said, "To feed the hungry and to greet with peace those you know, and those you do not know."—Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī, #28

However, when another man asked a similar question, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) gave a different response. Abdullah ibn Busr said:

> A man said, "O Messenger of God, the laws of Islam are many, so tell me one thing that I should hold on to steadfastly." The Prophet (*pbuh*) said, "Keep your tongue moistened with the remembrance of God."—Sunan At-Tirmidhī, #3375

In the first exchange, the man was likely someone unknown to the community because Muḥammad (*pbuh*) was known to give such advice to newcomers. Since a community's support helps individuals succeed and hold fast to their duties, sharing food and spreading greetings of peace is an ideal way to create ties with others. So, for him, that was most beneficial.

In the second incident, the person asking was clearly someone well versed in the religious duties of Islam and wanted to know one thing he should prioritize. Muḥammad (*pbuh*) gave him an answer that fulfilled his desire to hold onto that which is most important and helped him observe everything else as well. Since people who constantly remember God are aware of Him at all times, they are less prone to indulge in sin and are more motivated to do what they can to please the One they are continuously remembering. So, for him, that was most beneficial.

The prophets also tailored their instructions to address common needs of specific groups within their people. It is critical for educators to create an environment that encourages students to ask for what they need, and for teachers to identify recurring challenges and common needs among their students. Once they have identified those needs, it is important to pave a pathway for both current and future students that offers long-term resolution and ensures that the same request does not need to be put forth repeatedly.

How Muḥammad (*pbuh*) approached the needs of women in his community is a good example of this. Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri narrated:

> The women came to Prophet Muḥammad (*pbuh*) and said: "The men have prevailed upon your time, so make a

> day for us." He promised them a set day in which he met them, and he advised them and instructed them.—ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ, #101

Although Islam explicitly details rights for women, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) was aware that his society still carried the burden of a centuries-old mindset. When he identified that the women of his community might feel uncomfortable discussing certain issues among men, he fulfilled their request and incorporated it into his teaching approach.

When women wanted to ask about certain personal issues (e.g., menstruation, spousal intimacy, etc.), his wife Aisha helped bridge the gap to ensure all members of his community felt equally comfortable seeking answers to their questions.

Aisha narrates an incident in which a woman asked how she should wash herself to ensure that she was properly cleansed after her menses:

> … the Prophet told her what to do and ended by saying, "Purify yourself with a piece of cloth scented with musk." The woman asked, "How shall I purify myself with it?" The Prophet covered his face in shyness and said, "By the glory of God! Purify yourself with it." I pulled her aside and said, "Use it to wipe the place where the blood flows from."—SUNAN AL-NASĀ'Ī, #251

In this example, ʻA'isha ensured that the woman was properly educated in a situation that may have otherwise been confusing or uncomfortable. By being able to identify with and therefore address the woman's needs, ʻA'isha proved to be an effective link between the Prophet and women seeking to educate themselves.

Situational Approach to Teaching

In addition to crafting an environment that furthers the learning process, there are times when teachers find themselves in a situation that is primed for delivering instruction. The experience's spontaneity adds to the impact it has on the student and creates a powerful venue for learning. The prophets embraced a situational approach and often tied a given event or situation to the instructions being conveyed.

Jesus (*pbuh*) frequently used this approach. In fact, he encouraged his disciples to identify and benefit from situational learning opportunities on their own by observing the creation around them, saying:

> "Learn a lesson from the fig tree. As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near."—MATTHEW, 24: 32

In the following incident, Jesus (*pbuh*) took the opportunity to teach his disciples that it is not quantity but quality and sincerity that counts:

> **41.** Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.
>
> **42.** But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.
>
> **43.** Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.

> **44.** They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."—MARK, 12: 41–44

Another time, he drew his disciples' attention to a nearby child:

> **1.** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"
>
> **2.** He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.
>
> **3.** And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
>
> **4.** Therefore, whoever takes the humble position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."—MATTHEW, 18: 1–4

By placing the child among them, Jesus (*pbuh*) jarred their expectations since no one would imagine that a child would be the best of men. However, it is a child's purity and trust that men should emulate to achieve the greatest position in Heaven. He allowed them to experience what he was teaching rather than simply hearing what he was saying, and used the opportunity to create a situational learning experience.

We see this echoed many times in the legacy of Muḥammad (*pbuh*). In one such instance, a companion narrates that they witnessed a mother searching through a detention camp and when she found a child, she pulled him to her chest and began nursing:

> The Prophet said: "Do you think this woman would throw her child in the fire?" We said: "By God, no—not if she were able to avoid it!" He said: "God is more merciful with his servants than this woman is with her child."—RIYĀḌ AṢ-ṢĀLIḤĪN, #418

Again, the visceral nature of the example and its situational impact enabled the companions to experience the message rather than to simply examine a theoretical idea. He took a simple example, enhanced it through the situation, and used it to teach a profound lesson: no one cares for another more than God cares for His creation, not even a loving mother for her child. As educators, it is imperative that we remember to look for the experiential learning opportunities that surround us.

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) was so attuned to the value of teachable moments that even in the midst of personal hardship he sought to ensure that the right priorities were being observed. When an eclipse occurred while the Prophet was burying his young son, Ibrahim, he reminded his people not to fall back into ignorant beliefs. He understood that this was an event that people would remember and that whatever lesson he taught would be remembered along with it:

> The people said: "The sun eclipsed for the death of Ibrahim." The Prophet (*pbuh*) said: "The sun and the moon do not eclipse because of the death or life (birth) of anyone. When you see the eclipse, pray and supplicate God."—ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ, #1040

The prophets (*pbut*) paid close attention to their audiences and focused on ways to ensure that their message was embraced. By delivering their message in progressive portions and keeping

the recipient and situation in mind, they were able to address holistic community education and individualized instruction at the same time. Thus, the prophets (*pbut*) created a balance between the instruction they taught and the observable wisdom in their surroundings. As teachers, they excelled at keeping the main goal in mind and ensuring that recipients could understand, embrace, and properly apply their message.

CHAPTER SIX

Teaching by Asking Questions

"Skill in the art of questioning lies at the basis of all good teaching."

—George Herbert Betts

While students are expected to ask questions, the prophets used questions as a powerful teaching tool by posing them to their students. Teachers can use questions before dispensing instruction to determine the students' base level of understanding then tailor instructions to their level. Concluding with questions ensures that information was properly conveyed and understood. Sometimes a question can be rhetorical and is meant to affirm the student's understanding, while at other times it is meant to challenge preconceived notions.

A good teacher can use questions to steer students' thinking, help them focus on the purpose behind their hard work, and remind them with the inferiority of the alternative. Asking students to determine the goal of their pursuit can help them refocus their attention and give them the motivation to persevere.

Moses (*pbuh*) effectively redirected his people's thinking with very few words after they complained to him regarding the lack of variety in the food sent from Heaven:

> *And for you said, "O Moses, we will not be patient with one kind of food, so call upon your Lord to issue for us from what the earth produces of its herbs, and its cucumbers, and its garlic, and its lentils and its onions." He (Moses) said, "Would you substitute that which is lesser for that which is better? Go down to any province where assuredly there is for you what you ask!"*—AL-BAQARAH, 2: 61

With one question, Moses (*pbuh*) redirected his people's focus from what they were missing from their old life, to what they were trying to accomplish in their new one; he redirected their attention to the fact that what they were missing could be found in any town, but what they were receiving was a special gift for them alone. And though they suffered deprivation and hardship, Moses (*pbuh*) reminded them that their ultimate goal was to seek God's pleasure and guidance instead of enjoying food and comfort.

Moses (*pbuh*) also used that approach to stimulate their minds. Instead of giving direct instructions, he asked them what they would say to their own children in the future, in order to prepare them to think about the subject and be ready with answers:

> **20.** When your son asks you in time to come, saying, "What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the Lord our God has commanded you?"

21. Then you shall say to your son, "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

22. And the Lord showed great and devastating signs and wonders upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household before our eyes.

23. but he brought us from there in order to lead us in and give us the land that he swore to our ancestors.

24. The Lord commanded us to follow all these statutes and to fear the Lord our God for our prosperity always and for our preservation, as it is today.

25. Righteousness will be ours if we are careful to follow every one of these commands before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us."—DEUTERONOMY, 6: 20-25

This initial question signaled the importance of the words to follow and indicated what was about to be imparted should be preserved for future generations. It also placed the listeners in a situation they would face, which increased their emotional investment in the answer. In addition to asking an effective question, Moses (*pbuh*) also crafted an effective two-part answer. The first part referenced their salvation from oppression, thereby establishing a reminder of the "why" before addressing the "what," because knowing the "why-to-learn" compels students to embrace and retain the "what-to-learn." The second part focused their minds on his core instruction; namely, a concise and simple synopsis of what God had directed them to do, in order to preserve their history for future generations.

Jesus (*pbuh*) used this technique to generate teaching moments, often combining them with parables or invoking appropriate questions in specific situations and events:

> **9.** "What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?
>
> **10.** Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake?
>
> **11.** If you then, flawed as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!
>
> **12.** Therefore, everything you would like men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."—MATTHEW, 7: 9-12

After his vivid questions captured the people's attention, he explained how to behave with others by likening them to beloved family members. By using a rhetorical question, he taught his followers how to treat others with empathy and to judge their own actions by putting themselves in the other person's place.

In the following passage, Jesus (*pbuh*) responded to a question with a rhetorical question. This elicited critical thinking among his audience before he gave them a definitive answer:

> **9.** Jesus left that place and went into their synagogue.
>
> **10.** A man with a withered hand was there. Wanting to bring charges against Jesus, they asked, "Does the Law allow a person to heal on the Sabbath?"
>
> **11.** Jesus replied, "Who among you has a sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath and will not take hold of it and pull it out?

> **12.** How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! So, the Law allows a person to do what is good on the Sabbath."—MATTHEW, 12: 9-12

The manner in which he addressed the situation not only answered the question, but also guided the people to understand the law and how to determine priorities. In another instance, Jesus (*pbuh*) answered in a surprising way:

> **14.** When they came to him, they said, "Teacher, we know that you are true and swayed by no man. For you do not regard the person of men, but truthfully teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?
>
> **15.** Should we pay, or should we not pay? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why test me? Bring me a denarius that I may see it."
>
> **16.** They brought it, and he said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's."
>
> **17.** Then Jesus answered them, "Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." And they were surprised at him.—MARK, 12: 14-17

Jesus (*pbuh*) used a question to redirect the questioners' attention away from trivialities and toward the true essence of his message: to follow the canonical laws as a form of submission to God and not as a transactional activity. While Jesus (*pbuh*) could have responded directly, he wanted to teach them how to think for themselves and to answer their own question using the knowledge they already had.

He also used questions to encourage introspection and thereby

lead his followers to a higher level of self-discipline:

> **3.** "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the piece of wood in your own eye?
>
> **4.** How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a piece of wood in your own eye?
>
> **5.** You hypocrite, first take the piece of wood out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."—MATTHEW, 7: 3-5

In this example, he asked two questions; the first addressed the tendency of people to judge others before judging themselves, and the second made them look beyond the simple answer of claiming to help their brother and forced them to take a deeper analytical look at themselves.

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) used this technique to spark the listeners' attention and curiosity about the possible answer:

> "Do you know who is the bankrupt one within my nation?" They said, "The bankrupt one amongst us is he who has no dirham (money) or belongings." He said, "The bankrupt one of my nation is he who comes on the Day of Resurrection with prayers, fasting and charity—but he cursed some people, slandered others, unlawfully consumed the wealth of others, shed the blood of others, and beat others—so his good deeds will be given to this person, and that person, and the other person in compensation … and if his good deeds fall short to repay them, then sins of those people will be transferred to him

> (until his debt is fulfilled), then he will be thrown in the Fire."—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #2581

This captures an effective teaching moment that realigns people's understanding of true bankruptcy by using a parallel with the more familiar material bankruptcy. By asking a question, he prompted the listeners to envision a concrete example of financial hardship and then highlighted the fact that we should be more concerned with our actions which can lead to a much more harmful kind of bankruptcy.

In the following example, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) also leads with a question that produces an intuitive answer, which he then uses to teach his companions about the value of prayer. Abu Hurairah said:

> I heard the Prophet (*pbuh*) say, "If one of you had a river by the door of his house in which he bathed five times a day, do you think any filth would remain on him?" They replied, "No filth would remain on him." He said, "This is similar to the five (daily) prayers—God erases (your) sins with them."—RIYĀḌ AṢ-ṢĀLIḤĪN, #1042

He effectively used a question to create a direct link between the surety his companions had that bathing five times a day would purify and cleanse their body and the soul-cleansing from praying five times a day.

Anas Bin Malik narrates:

> A man said to the Prophet (*pbuh*): "When is the Last Hour?" The Prophet responded, "What did you prepare for it?" The man responded, "I did not prepare a lot of prayers, fasting, or charity—but I love God and His

> messenger." The Prophet responded, "Then you will be with those who you love."—ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ, #3688

By asking a simple question, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) indicated to his listeners that their attention should be focused on being prepared for the final hour rather than knowing when it will occur.

An effective teacher uses a student's questions to give comprehensive answers that go beyond the original scope of the question. When a teacher responds to a question with another question, students are compelled to use critical thinking to analyze their own question in light of the teacher's question.

Through this small selection of prophetic examples, we see how using questions increases the chance of information being retained in the minds of students, and can add an element of dynamic interactivity to learning. The prophets (*pbut*) embraced this method via posing rhetorical questions, asking questions that matched events and situations, and answering a question with a deeper question. This form of interactive teaching compels listeners to expand their views, readjust their thinking, and have a better understanding of the subject's true meaning. It also allows students to be full participants not just in the learning process, but also in the educational process as a whole.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Rhetorical Appeal in Teaching

> "Rhetoric: the ability, in each case, to see all of the available means of persuasion."
>
> —Aristotle

One of the most productive methods of teaching and persuasion is active participation in dialogue. Aristotle (384-322 BC) categorized the productive aspects of dialogue that lead to teaching and persuasion into three categories: ethos, pathos, and logos; or ethics, emotion, and logic. These three rhetorical appeals are the cornerstone of effective communication, teaching, and debate.

These components are not separate from each other, and most interactions utilize multiple components in an interdependent way. For example, while ethics is defined as a set of standards and norms addressing that which is deemed good for individuals and society, its development relies on the logical identification of individual and societal benefits, and the emotional identification with others in a society.

While the prophets (*pbut*) used all three components in teaching, they put a higher emphasis on logic. This speaks, yet again, to the longevity of their methods. Societal norms and emotion are subject to greater change, while the objective nature of logic gives it greater stability and endurance. Although the subject of this chapter is to examine rhetorical appeal, it is often used in conjunction with other teaching methods so we will use this opportunity to re-examine some examples from previous chapters with a new focus on how rhetorical appeal was used.

In the following example from Chapter 6, Moses (*pbuh*) used a combination of logic and emotion to stimulate the minds of the Children of Israel:

> **20.** When your son asks you in times to come, saying, "What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the Lord our God has commanded you?"
>
> **21.** Then you shall say to your son, "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.
>
> **22.** And the Lord showed great and devastating signs and wonders upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household before our eyes.
>
> **23.** He brought us out from there, so that He might bring us in, to give us the land which He swore to our fathers.
>
> **24.** The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us, as He has to this day.

> **25.** It will be our righteousness if we are careful to keep all these commandments before the Lord our God, just as He has commanded us."—DEUTERONOMY, 6: 20-25

Instead of asking them a direct question, Moses (*pbuh*) posed the question from the perspective of their offspring, thereby taking it from a theoretical discussion directly to their lives by invoking the emotion that parents have for their children, and society has for future generations. By placing them directly in a situation they would face, he increased their emotional investment in the answer, then laid out the logical path for the listener to arrive at the proper conclusion. He reminded them of the 'why' before addressing the 'what,' for this is the essence of the message's logical component.

Also in Chapter 6, we saw how Moses (*pbuh*) used logic to respond to his people's complaints:

> *And for you said, "O Moses, we will not be patient with one kind of food, so call upon your Lord (to) issue for us from what the earth produces of its herbs, and its cucumbers, and its garlic, and its lentils and its onions." He (Moses) said, "Would you substitute that which is lesser for that which is better? Go down to any province where assuredly there is for you what you ask!"…*—AL-BAQARAH, 2: 61

After addressing the inferiority of what they were requesting in comparison to what they were getting, he ended his argument by giving them a choice: accept it or seek the (inferior) alternative. Letting them choose made the logic of his argument even more compelling, since they were not being told to simply accept it, but were faced with a real choice that required them to parse the pros and cons of their decision.

Similarly, Moses (*pbuh*) used a combination of logic and emotion to support his argument against an illogical request from his people:

> **138.** *And We took the Children of Israel across the sea where they came upon a people huddling unto their idols. They said, "O Moses, make us a god just as they have gods." He said, "Assuredly, you people are being ignorant.*
>
> **139.** *Assuredly, these people are in ruination, and what they are doing is falsehood."*
>
> **140.** *He said, "Is it other than God, that I should desire for you as a god when He has favored you over the worlds?"*—
> AL-ARAAF, 7: 138-140

Here, Moses (*pbuh*) again used emotion and logic to remind his people of God's unique favor to them and the illogic of giving their loyalty to other than He who had saved them from their misery and protected them from Pharaoh's retribution.

We saw in Chapter 6 how Jesus (*pbuh*) combined logic, emotion, and ethics within a question and a parable as he steered the listener to think about how we treat others:

> **9.** "What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?
>
> **10.** Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake?
>
> **11.** If you then, flawed as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!
>
> **12.** Therefore, everything you would like men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the

Prophets."—MATTHEW, 7: 9-12

Here, he used the emotional instinct to protect one's children and the ethical standard of what constitutes proper decorum to logically cast the same expectation for others. By calling to mind that which we like and hate, Jesus (*pbuh*) argued that, logically, we should audit how we treat others by how we would react to being treated in the same way.

In another passage cited in Chapter 6, Jesus (*pbuh*) draws primarily on logic, and to a lesser extent emotion, to show the proper context of using religious ethics:

> **9.** Jesus left that place and went into their synagogue.
>
> **10.** A man with a withered hand was there. Wanting to bring charges against Jesus, they asked, "Does the Law allow a person to heal on the Sabbath?"
>
> **11.** Jesus replied, "Who among you has a sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath and will not take hold of it and pull it out?
>
> **12.** How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! So, the Law allows a person to do what is good on the Sabbath."—MATTHEW, 12: 9-12

His use of logic to compare what is appropriate toward a person versus what people routinely do for sheep rationally demonstrates how something of greater importance must supersede that which is traditionally accepted as proper ethics.

In the following parable, Jesus (*pbuh*) encourages people to learn, embrace, and preserve his teachings despite the multitude of worldly distractions:

1. That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.

2. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.

3. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow.

4. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

5. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil,

6. when the sun rose, they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.

7. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

8. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

9. He who has ears, let him hear."—MATTHEW, 13: 1-9

Then he explains what he meant:

18. "Hear then the parable of the sower:

19. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

20. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one

who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy,

21. yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

22. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

23. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."—MATTHEW, 13: 18-23

Instead of simply telling the crowd to heed and embrace his words in their lives, he used emotion and logic within a familiar parable and further equated it with knowledge and understanding the message. He describes those who are not attentive to the message as not benefitting from it, those who are minimally attentive as benefitting in the moment but retaining nothing for their future, and those who are attentive but are too attached to this worldly life as people who are ultimately distracted from the knowledge they acquire. It is only those who are attentive to the message, apply it in their lives, and steadfastly embrace it that harvest the fruit of what they learn.

This concept, which is applicable beyond the religious aspect, is something that we often see among students. Those who are distracted gain nothing, and those who listen reluctantly may gain knowledge for a while but soon forget everything. Others learn well in class but are distracted with playing games, watching TV,

and partying so that the knowledge they gain withers and disappears. Only those who pay attention to the lesson, embrace what they learn, apply it in their daily lives, and build upon it see the bountiful fruit of education.

In Chapter 5, we related the incident when Muḥammad (*pbuh*) observed a woman searching through a detention camp and, upon finding a child, she pulled him to her chest and started nursing him:

> The Prophet said: "Can you see this woman throwing her child in the fire?" We said: "By God, no—not if she is able to avoid it!" He said: "God is more merciful with his slaves than this woman is with her child."—RIYĀḌ AṢ-ṢĀLIḤĪN, #418

Since many people focus on the rules and laws within religion, their understanding of religion is often reduced to that of a disciplinary system. Therefore, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) used this teaching moment to remind people that they must not forget the spiritual and psychological aspect of their relationship with God. He capitalized on an emotional moment to make a logical connection between the intangible concept of infinite mercy and a tangible way to measure it. The listeners, emotionally engaged with a mother, rejected the idea that she would intentionally harm her child. He then directly tied this logical conclusion to the idea of God's boundless mercy and love, imparting a concrete understanding of an abstract concept. This association conveyed the glad tidings that God is more loving and merciful to His creation than a loving mother is to her child, and showed that it is critical to balance our understanding of laws and rules with a spiritual, loving connection to the Creator.

Abu Hurairah narrated an incident that shows Prophet

Muḥammad's methodical approach to using logic in emotional situations:

> A man from Banu Fazarah came to the Prophet and said, "My wife has given birth to a black boy," and he wanted to disown him. The Prophet asked, "Do you have camels?" He said, "Yes." The Prophet asked, "What color are they?" He said, "Red." The Prophet asked, "Are there any gray ones among them?" He said, "There are a few gray camels among them." The Prophet asked, "Why is that do you think?" He said, "Perhaps it is ancestry." The Prophet said, "Perhaps this is ancestry as well." And he did not permit him to disown the child.—SUNAN AL-NASĀ'Ī, #3479

Instead of saying that this could be an ancestral trait that expressed itself after some generations and is normal, he used logic to ensure that the man would be convinced of this possibility and that the child was indeed his own. By walking him through an example that he understood first-hand, the Prophet convinced him that his own situation was similar.

In another example, it was narrated that:

> A young man came to Prophet Muḥammad (*pbuh*) and said "O messenger of God, will you allow me to fornicate?" The people approached him and chided him. They said: "Shh, Shh." The Prophet (*pbuh*) said, "Come close," so he came close and sat next to him. The Prophet said to him, "Would you like it for your mother?" He said, "By God, no!" The Prophet said, "Other people would not like it for their mothers either." The Prophet said to him, "Would you like it for your daughter?" He said, "By God, no!" The Prophet said, "Other people would not like it for

> their daughters either." The Prophet said to him, "Would you like it for your sister?" He said, "By God, no!" The Prophet said, "Other people would not like it for their sisters either." The Prophet said to him, "Would you like it for your aunt?" He said, "By God, no!" The Prophet said, "Other people would not like it for their aunts either." Then the Prophet (*pbuh*) put his hand on him and said: "O God, forgive him and cleanse his heart and preserve his chastity," and since then the young man never looked to anything prohibited.—MUSNAD AHMAD, #22211

In this case, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) used emotion, ethics, and logic to produce a convincing argument. The young man already knew that fornication was prohibited, and the Prophet could have simply said that it is religiously disallowed, ethically abhorrent, and there is no exception. However, he brought the young man near to create a bond with him and walked him through an emotional step by step process so he could see that he would not like it for himself and his family. Consequently, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) interjected the logical argument, in each instance, that others would be equally offended by it. It made the young man see the holistic impact of his request on other people as well as society.

The prophets used the three aspects of rhetorical appeal, as defined by Aristotle, to convince their people that their message was valid in order to ensure that its personal and societal benefits would endure beyond the short term. In situations where emotions ran high, the prophets primarily used logic, since it is hard to counter emotion with emotion. Where people were emotionally detached from understanding a lesson, the prophets

used emotion to connect people with the issue and help them see the logic of their argument. In many cases, they used a combination of aspects to craft the most effective address to a situation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Using Stories, Anecdotes and Parables

> "If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten."
>
> —Rudyard Kipling

Throughout this booklet, we have cited how the prophets used stories, anecdotes, and parables to provide listeners with memorable teaching moments. These forms of figurative language can add great value to the teaching process and allow students to visualize the lesson, thus engaging a part of the mind that enhances recall and understanding. An interesting story or parable excites the imagination and engages students in the learning process in a relaxed manner, and inspires them toward visual thinking. Figurative language also provides an applied example that allows students to appreciate, in practical terms, the benefit of the lesson or message being delivered.

In addition, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recount stories about previous prophets, peace and blessings be upon them. While they differ in the level of detail and focal points

within the stories, there is a core similarity that connects them to a common history. Certainly, the stories of past prophets are some of the common threads that tie these three religions to one another. While the events recounted in the stories were not witnessed by Prophets Moses, Jesus, or Muḥammad, they were Divinely inspired to the prophets or recorded by scribes from previous generations. These stories were of great teaching value and were used to impart lessons learned from previous prophets, often accompanied by specific commands and actions relayed within the story. We should note that, with the exception of Prophet Joseph, whose life is presented as a full chronological story, the Qur'an presents these stories as specific teaching moments interspersed as excerpts throughout the text.

We will explore the stories of the prophets Adam, Noah, and Joseph (*pbut*) by focusing on select teaching moments from each story and identifying commandments or actions by Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad (*pbut*) that re-enforce the lessons learned.

The Story of Adam

The story of Adam (*pbuh*), the forefather of humanity, offers many important lessons. All three traditions narrate similar key elements of the story: Adam, the first human, disobeyed God and was sent to Earth thereafter. The *Hebrew Bible* indicates that it was Eve (*pbuh*), Adam's wife, who was lured by a serpent and committed the act of disobedience, then encouraged Adam (*pbuh*) to follow suit.

> **6.** When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave

some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

7. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

8. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

9. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

10. He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

11. And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

12. The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."—GENESIS, 3: 6-12

The Qur'an states that Satan lured both Adam and Eve (*pbut*) into disobedience, after which they both repented for their disobedience. God forgave them and sent them to Earth as a trial for them and for their descendants, to serve as a test of character for each person to exert self-control when exposed to the lure of Satan and, like Adam (*pbuh*), to make timely repentance for mistakes.

120. *Then Satan whispered to him; he said, "O Adam, shall I show to you the tree of eternity and dominion that wastes not away?"*

121. *And they [Adam and his wife] ate from it, and their private parts became apparent to them, and they began to affix upon themselves leaves of The Garden; and Adam disobeyed his Lord, thus he strayed.*

122. *Then his Lord embraced him, so He forgave him and guided him.*

123. *He said "Descend you both from it—all (you and your descendants). Some of you will be to others enemies; and when you receive from Me guidance, then whoever follows My guidance shall neither deviate nor be wretched."*—TA HA, 20: 120-123

The story is part of all three traditions, and their followers should seek to learn the lessons therein. The prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad (*pbut*) applied what they learned and commanded their people to implement them as well.

Moses (*pbuh*) commanded his people to repent for their wrongs, whether against other people or God, with details on how to do so in both cases:

5. The Lord said to Moses,

6. Say to the Israelites: "Any man or woman who wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord is guilty

7. and must confess the sin they have committed. They must make full restitution for the wrong they have done, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the person they have wronged."—NUMBERS, 5: 5-7

14. The Lord said to Moses:

15. "When anyone is unfaithful to the Lord by sinning unintentionally in regard to any of the Lord's holy things, they are to bring to the Lord as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. It is a guilt offering."—LEVITICUS, 5: 14-15

Jesus (*pbuh*) repeatedly commanded his people to repent when they sinned or made mistakes:

17. From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"—MATTHEW, 4: 17.

And in another example, he expands on that command and ties repentance directly to one's status as one awaits judgement before God:

20. Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

21. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you."—MATTHEW, 11: 20-22

Like Jesus and Moses (*pbut*), Muḥammad (*pbuh*) commanded his followers to repent, and highlighted the delight that God has towards the repentant:

> "What would you say about the delight of a person whose camel loaded with provisions slipped away and was lost in a barren desert in which there is neither food nor drink—so the person was forced to wander around searching for it until he was completely exhausted—then the camel passed by a tree and its harness became entangled so that the man accidentally found it?" We said, "He would be extremely delighted!" The Prophet (*pbuh*) said: "By God, God is more delighted at the repentance of His servant than that person would be in finding his lost camel."—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #2746

Another significant aspect of Adam's story relates to resisting temptation. Jesus (*pbuh*) commanded his people to control their desires, reminding them of the importance of resisting temptation:

> **40.** Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, could you not keep watch with me one hour?
>
> **41.** Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."—MATTHEW, 26: 40-41

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) often discussed internal struggles and told his people to fight temptation and exercise self-control:

> "… the Muslim is one who people are secure from his tongue and his hand, and the believer is one who people entrust with their wealth and their selves, and the sojourner unto God is one who abandons sin and indiscretion, and the warrior is one who fights his own self

in obedience to God."—MISHKĀT AL-MAṢĀBĪḤ, #33 AND #34

While we seek to examine the manner in which the prophets learned, and consequently taught their people, we must remember that the content of the lessons they drew from is relevant to our classrooms as well. One of the biggest challenges educators face is fostering not only students' intellect, but also their sense of duty toward others so that an effective learning environment can be established. It is important that students are taught to exert self-control, take responsibility for their actions, and atone for their mistakes.

The Story of Noah

Noah's story (*pbuh*) also has many lessons. The Abrahamic traditions agree on key parts of the story: that Noah (*pbuh*) lived for many. many years as a righteous man among a very corrupt people, and that God ordered him to build an ark to accommodate the people and animals destined to survive a cataclysmic flood.

This segment begins after Noah (*pbuh*) spent many years calling his people to the truth, only to be ignored and mocked. Following God's commandment, he began building a massive boat on dry land. The Qur'an narrates the following vivid scene:

> *And he worked on building the ark; whenever some of his people passed by him, they ridiculed him. He said, "If you ridicule us, we ridicule you the same way you ridicule. You will surely know upon whom will come a punishment that will abase them, and upon whom will befall a lasting punishment."*—HUUD, 11: 38-39

For those without prophetic knowledge, building an ark in the middle of dry land would seem ridiculous. While the people ridiculed Noah (*pbuh*) in ignorance, he was secure in his response with the knowledge that God's decree would come to pass. Although their disrespect was a particularly fatal mistake for them, it is a pattern often seen throughout history. Teachers are duty-bound to impart this lesson to their students, for it is a mistake to mock others when presented with a new paradigm. Even if an idea has been fully investigated and found wanting, students and teachers alike should state their objection(s) in a manner that will not humiliate others.

The *Hebrew Bible* underlines the necessity of humility and keeping oneself from mocking others:

> **23.** Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.
>
> **24.** "Scoffer" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.—PROVERBS, 21: 23-24

Jesus (*pbuh*) encouraged those who were being ridiculed for observing their faith, and referenced the lives of previous prophets who endured the same:

> **10.** Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
>
> **11.** Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
>
> **12.** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.—MATTHEW, 5: 10-12

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) warned his companions not to look down on others in the following exchange:

> It is narrated on the authority of Abdullah bin Mas'ud that the Prophet (*pbuh*) said, "He who has in his heart the weight of a mustard seed of arrogance shall not enter Paradise." A person said, "Assuredly a person loves that his dress should be fine, and his shoes should be fine." The Prophet replied, "Verily, God is beautiful and He loves beauty. Arrogance is disdaining the truth, and having contempt for other people."—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #91A

Noah's story continues as the storms and flooding began. The Qur'an records an emotional narration of an exchange between Noah (*pbuh*) and one of his sons as the flood was building:

> **42.** *And while it navigated, amidst waves like mountains, Noah called unto his son, who was taking shelter, "Oh, my son! Embark with us, and do not be with the disbelievers."*
>
> **43.** *He said, "I will take shelter on a mountain—it will protect me from the water." He said, "There is no protection from God's decree today, except for those on whom He has mercy." —And the waves surged between them, and he was among the drowned.*—HUUD, 11: 42-43

As the flood was building, everyone could see that a massive deluge was heading for them and that Noah's foresight had been sound. Yet, some people (including one of Noah's sons) continued to delude themselves despite the clear evidence. Noah, (*pbuh*) a teacher at heart, even amidst calamity sought to convey the lesson he had been trying to teach his people for generations. Rather than telling his son, "…Embark with us so you won't

drown," he said, "…Embark with us, and do not be with the disbelievers." He made a distinction between living and living in submission to God so that it might become his salvation in this life and the next.

As in the story of Noah (*pbuh*), facing the consequences of one's actions is something that Prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad (*pbut*) all warned their people about. In fact, it was a core part of their message to humanity.

Moses (*pbuh*) made it clear to his people that being conscious of God should be a priority when making decisions:

> **23.** "But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out."—NUMBERS, 32: 23

The Qur'an admonishes those who reject the Divine path with a very clear warning:

> **124.** *And whoever averts from My remembrance then assuredly unto him is a distressful life, and We will raise him, on the Day of Rising, blind.*
>
> **125.** *He will say, "My Lord, why have You raised me blind when I was fully sighted?"*
>
> **126.** *He will say, "For Our signs came to you, yet you forgot them and thus today you are forgotten."*
>
> **127.** *And thus We will recompense whoever transgressed and had not faith in the signs of his Lord; and the torment of the afterlife is stronger and more lasting.*—TA HA, 20: 124-127

Jesus (*pbuh*) echoed this lesson and often reminded his people

to be mindful of God and cautious of the consequences of following their whims:

> **7.** "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.
>
> **8.** Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."—GALATIANS, 6: 7-8

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) responded in a similar fashion when asked to sum up faith in a binary way:

> A man came to Prophet Muḥammad (*pbuh*) and asked him: "What are definite sets of cause and effect?" He said: "Whoever dies and associates none with God enters Paradise, and whoever dies associating anything with God enters Hell."—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #93A

As evidenced by the prophets (*pbut*), it is important for the teacher to clearly define boundaries and consequences, as well as expectations and goals. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that students not only have the tools they need to succeed—which includes what is expected of them and how to accomplish it—but also that the students understand in detail, the results of their actions. Students are often capable of producing a higher and more nuanced caliber of work, if provided with the refined guidance to do so. As Noah (*pbuh*) did when calling to his son, teachers should define an immediate goal alongside an ultimate aspiration. Using a simple, achievable goal ("Embark with us …") with a directed purpose ("… do not be with the disbelievers,") helps students achieve a greater and more complex goal in the long term (attaining God's pleasure and salvation).

The Story of Joseph

Joseph's story, which recounts events throughout his life, opens with a lesson about the consequences of overtly favoring one child over another.

> **7.** *Certainly there are, in Joseph and his brothers, signs for those who ask.*
>
> **8.** *When they said, "Joseph and his brother are more beloved to our father than we, yet we are a clan. Indeed, our father is in clear error.*
>
> **9.** *Kill Joseph or relegate him to some other land; the countenance of your father will then be only for you, and you will be after that a righteous people."*
>
> **10.** *One of them said, "Do not kill Joseph but throw him into the bottom of the well; some travelers will pick him up—if you want to act."*—YUSUF, 12: 7-10

Because Joseph (*pbuh*) was favored by his father, his half-brothers envied and hated him. Jealousy between students, like jealously between siblings, is a destructive force and teachers must avoid allowing enmity to grow among their students due to favoritism. It is important for teachers to find praiseworthy attributes, even in students who may be struggling, to encourage their growth and to promote positive qualities. Often, the most effective teachers are those who motivate their students by praising improvements rather than highlighting failures. All three prophets observed this lesson and warned their people against having or causing envy toward others.

Moses (*pbuh*) relayed the following from God's commandments:

> **17.** "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."—EXODUS, 20: 17

Jesus (*pbuh*) also warned against envy and other things that come from within to defile one's character:

> **21.** "For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder,
>
> **22.** adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.
>
> **23.** All these evils come from inside and defile a person."
> —MARK, 7: 21-23

One companion related the following incident in which Muḥammad (*pbuh*) rejected the favoring of one child over another since it creates envy and animosity among siblings:

> I heard An-Nu'man bin Bashir on the pulpit saying, "My father gave me a gift, but my mother said that she would not allow it unless the Prophet approved it. So, my father went to the Prophet and said, 'I have given a gift to my son from Amra bint Rawaha, but she ordered me to make you a witness to it.' The Prophet asked, 'Have you given (the like of it) to every one of your children?' He replied, 'No.' The Prophet said, 'Observe God, and be just to your children.' My father then returned and took back his gift."—ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUKHĀRĪ, #2587

In another instance, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) warned that envy and faith are mutually exclusive:

> "… two things will never be found together in the heart of God's servant: faith and envy."—SUNAN AL-NASĀ'Ī, #3109

As envy consumed them, Joseph's brothers decided to get rid of Joseph by casting him in a well. He was later found by a caravan enroute to Egypt, where he was sold to a prominent Egyptian. As a young man, Joseph (*pbuh*) was trustworthy, judicious, and handsome, which led his master to entrust him with the palace affairs and led his master's wife to desire him. Joseph (*pbuh*) honored his master and obeyed God; he refused the wife's proposal to commit adultery, which led him to be imprisoned.

While in prison, Joseph (*pbuh*) gained a reputation for dream interpretation. This eventually led him to appear before the king of Egypt and accurately interpret his dream, forewarning of a coming famine. He advised the king to prepare for it by storing food for their time of need. The king, impressed by Joseph's ability and character, freed him and appointed him to an esteemed position, second only to the king himself:

> **40.** "You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."—GENESIS, 41: 40

Joseph had held a respected position prior to being thrown into prison. However, his imprisonment set the stage for him to become one of the most prominent and powerful men in the kingdom; enduring hardship took him from being a house keeper to a kingdom keeper.

This powerful lesson is often forgotten in times of difficulty and tribulation, for we tend to react to hardship with anger or complaint and forget that it may be the thing that leads to a better

future outcome. Educators should remind their students that not only can difficulties result in unexpectedly positive outcomes, but also that the experience itself can change the trajectory of their future. Those who focus on increasing their patience and adaptability will find themselves more comfortable and prepared for life's trials.

Prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad (*pbut*) frequently reminded their people to focus on the positive, to be patient with hardship, to trust in their Lord, and to acknowledge that some things are beyond their control.

Moses (*pbuh*) reminded his people how hardship had helped them overcome their pride and that their Lord had granted them many mercies during hard times:

> **1.** "Be careful to do all that I am telling you today. Then you will live and have many children, and go in to own the land the Lord promised to give to your fathers.
>
> **2.** You will remember all the way the Lord your God led you in the desert these forty years, so you would not have pride, and how He tested you to know what was in your heart to see if you would obey His Laws or not.
>
> **3.** He let you be hungry which helped you to not have pride. Then He fed you with bread from heaven which you and your fathers had not known. He did this to make you understand that man does not live by bread alone. But man lives by everything that comes out of the mouth of the Lord.
>
> **4.** Your clothes did not wear out, and your feet did not get sore during these forty years.

> **5.** Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you."—DEUTERONOMY, 8: 1-5

Jesus (*pbuh*) reminded his followers that hardship is a matter of perception, and that enduring it while having faith is far more useful than fretting about things one cannot control:

> **25.** "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"—MATTHEW, 6: 25

Muḥammad (*pbuh*) clearly defined the relationship between hardship and reward:

> It was narrated from Anas bin Malik that the Prophet (*pbuh*) said: "The greatest reward comes with the greatest trial. When God loves a people, He tests them. Whoever accepts it earns His pleasure, and whoever is discontented with it earns His wrath."—SUNAN IBN MAJAH, #4031

And, in another exchange:

> Suhaib reported that the Prophet (*pbuh*) said, "Wondrous are the ways of the faithful for there is good in every affair for him, and this is not the case except for the faithful; if he receives good, he thanks God—thus there is good for him in it—and if he receives hardship he endures—thus there is good for him in it."—ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, #2999

Joseph (*pbuh*) endured, and was rewarded with dominion over the wealth of a nation. While Egypt was prepared for the oncoming famine, the surrounding regions were not and Joseph's

half-brothers were among those who flocked to Egypt in search of aid. He immediately recognized them and, upon revealing his identity, witnessed their shock. They sought his forgiveness, and Joseph (*pbuh*) enacted a lesson that is commonly taught and often forgotten: given the choice between exacting revenge from his new position of power or forgiving his brothers, he chose the latter.

Jesus (*pbuh*) not only commanded his disciples to forgive those who wronged them, but narrated a story that exemplified the benefit of forgiving and the drawback of not doing so:

> **21.** Then Peter came to him and said, "Master, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"
>
> **22.** Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.
>
> **23.** Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.
>
> **24.** And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.
>
> **25.** But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.
>
> **26.** The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'
>
> **27.** Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.
>
> **28.** But that servant went out and found one of his fellow

servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'

29. So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'

30. And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

31. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.

32. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.

33. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'

34. And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

35. So my heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."—MATTHEW, 18: 21-35

Similarly, Muḥammad (*pbuh*) tied one's action toward people to one's expectation from God:

Abdullah ibn al-'As reported that Muḥammad (*pbuh*) said, "Show mercy, and you will be shown mercy. Forgive, and God will forgive you …"—AL-ADAB AL-MUFRAD, #380

The stories of previous prophets provide future generations with a historical account of important incidents and the lessons therein. Although behavior can be dictated by commands, people learn much better when they experience a lesson in its applied form. Such stories serve as a gentle and engaging way for people to experience the applied lesson and see the commands in action.

An effective teacher recognizes the power of storytelling and uses it to explain difficult or complex concepts in an accessible manner. The prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad (*pbut*) internalized the lessons they learned from the lives of previous prophets and, throughout this chapter, we examined how they used those lessons to relay Divine commands and instructions to their own people. As educators, we should learn these lessons and incorporate storytelling as a way to pass our experience on to our students.

Convergence

Convergence: [kuhn-vur-juhns] an act or instance of tending to a common result, conclusion, place, or thought.

All teachers need to remember that even the prophets, who had natural leadership and Divinely inspired preparation on their side, faced many difficulties and challenges.

The Qur'an mentions how Moses (*pbuh*) was harmed by his people:

> *For Moses said to his people "Why do you harm me when you know that I am God's messenger to you?"*—As-Saff, 61: 5

He continued to suffer such difficulties until his final days, as observed in his last sermon to the Children of Israel prior to ascending Mount Horeb:

> **2.** Moses sent for all the Israelites. Here is what he said to them. "With your own eyes you have seen everything the Lord did in Egypt to Pharaoh. You have seen what he did to all Pharaoh's officials and to his whole land.

3. With your own eyes you saw how the Lord really made them suffer. You saw the signs and amazing things he did.

4. But to this day the Lord hasn't given you a mind that understands. He hasn't given you eyes that see. He hasn't given you ears that hear."—DEUTERONOMY, 29: 2-4

Jesus (*pbuh*) highlighted similar psychological difficulties that stood as a barrier between him and those to whom he was bringing God's message. He affirmed the words of a previous prophet who foretold of the resistance the people would pose:

15. "This people will listen and listen, but not understand; they will look and look but not see, because their minds are dull, and they have stopped up their ears and have closed their eyes. Otherwise, their eyes would see, their ears would hear, their minds would understand, and they would turn to Me, says God, and I would heal them."—MATTHEW, 13: 15

God encouraged Muḥammad (*pbuh*) to remain patient through the hardship he was facing:

"And be patient, and your patience is not but through God. And do not grieve over them and do not be in distress over what they plot."—AN-NAHL, 16: 127

Looking at the lives of the prophets, we can see that they were great teachers and inspiring examples to us all. They faced perhaps the greatest trials, yet they endured with grace and patience. They surrounded themselves with people they could rely on and accepted advice with humility and thoughtfulness. They learned to adapt themselves and their approaches through observation and insight. But perhaps their greatest characteristic

was that, while they did their duty with diligence, they recognized that they must leave the rest in the hands of God. Likewise, as educators, we must treat the work we do as an achievement in and of itself. All educators will face trials, yet they leave behind a legacy. Although they may never live to see it, that legacy is carried on by their students who continue to build upon the foundation their teachers laid for them.

Throughout this brief journey, we explored a very specific pathway within the lives of three great prophets. Our journey was never intended to give a full account of their lives, examine specific religious teachings, or highlight prophetic miracles. Rather, our focus was on the teacher's identity within each prophet. In our research, we relied solely on generally agreed-upon references for each religion, namely, the *Hebrew Bible*, the New Testament, and the Qur'an and Ḥadīth literature.

In order to study how each prophet achieved a solid educational outcome, we organized our observations into chapters, each centered on a specific element within the prophetic teacher's identity. Notwithstanding our attempt in this regard, we hope the reader will recognize that the chapters are interlinked and that many of the examples cited include multiple educational elements that apply to more than one chapter's premise.

When viewing the examples in totality, one sees that the prophets' teaching process was deliberate, multi-faceted, and consistent. The reader is encouraged to re-read this booklet, keeping the chapters' interlinked nature in mind. Our hope is that the reader will look beyond the content of this booklet and focus on the processes that the prophets used in their teaching to reexamine historical and contemporary events through a lens that

focuses new light on educational methodology.

When we began our research, we expected to find some parallels between the three prophets' educational methodologies as well as their correlation to modern educational practices. Instead, we discovered profound similarities in how they embraced and applied their teaching roles and fostered long-standing legacies. We also observed a remarkable pattern of adaptation in how they tailored their methodologies of edification when necessary, thereby highlighting the notion of personalized instruction.

Finally, we found a significant convergence between many aspects of the three traditions, such as the core essence of the prophetic messages, biographical accounts of past prophets, and the suitability of each prophet's character to his respective message and people. The Qur'an, being the last revelation, and the Ḥadīth literature include many references to both Prophets Moses and Jesus (*pbut*) that provide us with additional material to appreciate these three traditions' convergence. Due to the focused scope of this work, we did not explore the full extent of the complex ties among these three traditions. However, we recognize it as a worthwhile pursuit and hope to address it in future publications.

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Dr. Aboul Makarem holds two postgraduate degrees and has been involved in numerous projects as a result of his love for knowledge, education, and interfaith pursuits. His current projects include authoring a publication to assist in the meaning-based recitation of Qur'an, developing a debt-free home finance system based on in-depth research of Islamic Law and the American economic system, and an English translation of the Qur'an.

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CONVERGENCE

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