239417 - What is the best approach to provide a proper Islamic education?

the question

There are many people who memorise Quran, because there are many Quran teachers, and who learn fiqh, because there are many shaykhs and teachers, but the problem that we have noticed and are aware of is that when they are mixing and dealing with people, their manner reflects a bad attitude or, in other words, a terrifying and destructive kind of illiteracy in the field of manners and attitude. Where are the teachers who can teach proper manners and attitudes, and how can we reach them?
How can we include teaching proper manners and attitude in the curricula for Islamic studies? What is the benefit of knowledge without proper manners and attitude? What we do not understand is: how could educators neglect to teach their students good manners and attitudes? Why did they choose to work in the field of education? As for the role of the family, it is quite dismal, for the family is not playing any role at all in teaching proper manners and attitude! How should the educator – male or female – be? Is the teaching of manners and good attitudes a science in and of itself, or could such matters be learned from people of knowledge and understanding?
How did the scholars, kings and sultans among the early generations, and prominent figures and common people raise their children?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is obvious to anyone who reflects that there has arisen a division and separation between knowledge and action, between knowledge and proper manners and attitudes, in the minds of many of the ordinary people and of the elite. As a result of that, many of them think that the issue

of good manners and morals is purely theoretical, and that it is connected to the parents' ability to fill their children's minds with all kinds of knowledge and memorisation of texts, in addition to their efforts to acquire and read the greatest possible number of books and research material that discuss approaches to teaching morals and manners, and the like – to the extent that in their minds, dealing with Islamic texts has become something purely theoretical and academic, without thinking that those texts should have an impact on people's behaviour and attitude, and on their deeds and actions.

One example of that is their interpretation of the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge" [Faatir 35:28]. They interpret this verse as referring to everyone who has knowledge of shar'i rulings, or of empirical science, even though the verse does not mean that every knowledgeable person fears Allah; rather it means that everyone who fears Allah is knowledgeable.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Majmoo' al-Fataawa (7/539):

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge" [Faatir 35:28]. This indicates that everyone who fears Allah has knowledge, and this is true; it does not indicate that everyone who has knowledge fears Him. End quote.

Elsewhere (7/21), he (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

What is meant is that no one fears Him except one who has knowledge. Allah tells us that everyone who fears Allah has knowledge, as He says in another verse (interpretation of the meaning):

"Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, [like one who does not]? Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?'" [az-Zumar 39:9].

End quote.

This second verse is the other verse to which Shaykh al-Islam was referring, and which is misinterpreted as being praise for knowledge and understanding, even if they are disassociated from righteous deeds and good manners and attitude. That is because they quote the last part of the verse, and not the first part. The words “Say, ‘Are those who know equal to those who do not know?’” are to be understood in the light of what comes before them: “Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, [like one who does not]?” Therefore “those who know”, in this instance, are those who stand and pray to Allah during the night, out of fear of His fire and hoping for His paradise and His mercy; those who do not know are who are heedless of that, so think about this! Hence Imam Ibn al-Qayyim said in Miftaah Dar as-Sa‘aadah (1/89), affirming an important guideline in this regard:

The early generations only used the word fiqh (lit., understanding) to refer to knowledge accompanied by action (and not just theoretical knowledge). End quote.

This is the real meaning of fiqh according to our righteous predecessors: Knowledge which is accompanied by action. But when many daa‘iyahs and educators overlooked this fact, they ended up focusing on knowledge as something theoretical and academic, and they did not think of it as a means of correcting behaviour, purifying hearts, striving against one’s evil inclinations and developing right attitudes, because they thought that the academic side of knowledge and fiqh was all there was to it and was all that one should seek – but that is not the case.

Raising the young generation and teaching them good morals and attitudes, and how to adhere to religious teachings, is something that cannot be achieved except by pious people, whether they are scholars, daa‘iyahs, reformers or teachers. The word translated here as pious scholar (rabbaani) refers to one who is greatly devoted to the Lord, may He be glorified, in his knowledge, his deeds and his teaching of others.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“…but [instead, he would say], ‘Be pious scholars of the Lord because of what you have taught of the Scripture and because of what you have studied” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:79].

Imam ash-Shawkaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Fat-h al-Qadeer (1/407):

The word translated here as pious scholar (rabbaani) refers to one who is devoted to the Lord (ar-Rabb). The suffix -aani is added by way of emphasis, just as one who has a large beard (lihyah) may be described as lihyaani, and so on.

And it was said that the pious scholar (rabbaani) is the one who teaches the people minor issues of knowledge before major issues, as if he is following the approach of the Lord, may He be glorified, in making things easy.

End quote.

Conclusion:

Education is not mere words that have no impact on people’s behaviour and attitude, and it is not mere theory separated from belief. Rather the aim of education is to help the student to develop a strong character, and to both acquire knowledge and develop patience, acquire understanding and develop wisdom, so that he acts upon what he learns and teaches others about it.

Hence Imam ash-Shawkaani said regarding the words “because of what you have taught of the Scripture [bima kuntum tu‘allimoona al-kitaab]” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:79]:

Those who read it as tu‘allimoona [so that the phrase means: because of what you have taught of the Scripture] must interpret the word rabbaani [translated above as pious scholar] as meaning one who has something in addition to knowledge and teaching; he should also be sincere or wise or patient.

Those who read it as ta‘lamoona [so that the phrase would mean: because of what you know of the Scripture] may interpret the word rabbaani as meaning a knowledgeable person who teaches the people. Thus the meaning is: be teachers, for you have knowledge, and because you have

studied knowledge.

This verse offers the greatest motivation for the one who has knowledge to act upon his knowledge, and one of the best ways of implementing what one knows is to teach it and to be sincere to Allah, may He be glorified."(Fat-h al-Qadeer 1/407)

Thus it becomes clear that the essence and foundation of proper education is to educate by example, not by mere empty words that are detached from one’s behaviour and deeds.

Hence al-Haafiz Ibn Rajab (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his interesting essay, Fadl ‘Ilm as-Salaf ‘ala ‘Ilm al-Khalaf (p. 5):

Many seekers of knowledge among the later generations got it wrong when they thought that one who speaks a great deal about issues of religion, and argues and debates, is more knowledgeable than one who is not like that. This is pure ignorance; look at the senior Sahaabah and the most knowledgeable among them, such as Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Ali, Mu‘aadh, Ibn Mas‘ood and Zayd ibn Thaabit, and how they were. They spoke less than Ibn ‘Abbaas, but they had more knowledge than he did.

Similarly, the Taabi‘een spoke more than the Sahaabah, but the Sahaabah had more knowledge than they did.

Similarly, the followers of the Taabi‘een spoke more than the Taabi‘een, but the Taabi‘een had more knowledge than they did.

Knowledge does not mean memorising a lot of religious texts or speaking a great deal in khutbahs and lessons; rather knowledge is a light that is instilled in the heart, by means of which a person may understand issues on the basis of truth and be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and he expresses that in concise words that serve the purpose. End quote.

This is the greatest calamity that has befallen Muslim households and educational institutions, namely their lack of righteous and pious teachers who could educate and guide them by example, not only by their words, and when teaching would be able to combine sound words and sound

deeds, using a wise approach and proper understanding of the religion of Allah, may He be exalted, and what He wants from His slaves.

Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It should be understood that this education is like a seed and the educator is like the soil; if the soil is of poor quality, then the seed will be lost and wasted, but if the soil is good, the seed will grow and develop."(Al-Adaab ash-Shar'iyyah by Ibn Muflih 3/580).

Because of the above, some of the scholars and reformers were able to raise righteous children and teach them good morals and attitudes, and many fuqaha' and educators were able to discipline their students. Here we may confirm that there is a limit to causes and measures that may be taken, and all matters are to be entrusted to the Lord of Lords, the Creator of people's deeds, the One Who guides to the straight path. All that educators and parents can do is discipline their children and teach them morals and manners. As for making a person truly righteous and purifying his heart, no one can do that except Allah.

Hence it is said that all that parents can do is teach their children good manners; righteousness may be attained by the help of Allah."(Al-Adaab ash-Shar'iyyah by Ibn Muflih 3/552)

Finally:

The way to achieve this, realistically, may be summed up in a few brief points:

1. Daa'iyahs and teachers should be made aware of what education means in a comprehensive sense.

2.Reformers who work with ordinary Muslims should be made aware of various approaches to education.

3.Reformers should cooperate with people of virtue and prominence in Muslim societies to establish educational institutions that focus on manners and behaviour, to work in conjunction with existing educational institutions, and to train some people to carry on the mission of educating

people and teaching them proper manners, morals and behaviour.

And Allah knows best.