

ISSN - 10794-4829

AL-NAHDAH

A Journal of Islamic Heritage



Published by:
Centre for Islamic Studies,
Usmanu Danfodiyo University,
Sokoto - Nigeria
March, 2007.

Vol. 4, Nos. 1&2 (March 2007)

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A GLIMPSE OF THE QUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN IDEAL TEACHER OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

By

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Introduction

Teachers in Islamic setting are called by different names depending on the level at which they operate. At the elementary level of education, the teacher is called *Mu'addib* (teacher of manners). Other Arabic names for a teacher include *mudarris*, *mufallim*, *Shaykh*, *ustadh* and even *Imam*. In the Moorish society, learned men are eulogistically given the title *ayan* (notables),¹ while in Yorubaland, they are called *Alfa*, a name believed to have been etymologically coined from the Arabic word for a 'thousand' (*alf*), to denote a single person representing one thousand people in terms of knowledge. Another view is that it is from the first Arabic alphabet, *alif*, to denote someone in the forefront when it comes to knowledge.

In the contemporary period, some scholars have observed lapses in teaching as a profession. These include the absence of the teacher as exemplar in education and character and the great dichotomy between his scholastic activity and his private and social life which has rendered him to become a mere propagator of knowledge.² In the western circle, emphasis is laid on teachers' academic qualifications with no regard for their character, and this, no doubt has implications on the students who are invariably products of such teachers. It thus becomes expedient to look at the divine nature of teaching as a profession and link this with the qualities and responsibilities of a teacher of Islamic Studies who combines both the spiritual and mundane aspects of the profession. This would make a teacher of the discipline realize that a teacher is a teacher, but a teacher of Islamic Studies is a teacher with difference.

The Genesis and Plight of Teaching

As part of His divine plan to create a *khalifah* or vicegerent on earth, Allah, created Adam, installed in him reasoning faculties and taught him the nature and names of things, the honour and privilege He did not give the Angels.³ With this special gift, Allah debunked the initial execration of the Angels against Adam, exculpated and extrinsically motivated him by commanding the Angels to do obeisance to him, a scene which manifests the supremacy of those who know upon those who don't. Thus, teaching which in Arabic means *ta'lim*, *tadris*, or *ta'dib*⁴ is as old as man and the

first teacher is Allah Himself. The first man to be taught was Adam. The fact that Allah is the Source of all branches of knowledge and the greatest teacher ever known, is attested to in some verses of the Qur'an.⁵ It can also be inferred from the Qur'an that next to the task of creation is the art of teaching.⁶

After the exit of Adam from the *Jannah*, the Almighty Allah did not leave him alone. Rather, a sort of guidance programme was organized for him to understand himself and his new environment.⁷ Since both the arts of teaching and guidance are out to develop the learner's cognitive, affective and psycho-motor domains, it then becomes manifest that the two means were employed by Allah to teach and educate Adam.

Still on the art of teaching, Allah further used another means of teaching man what he hitherto did not know. The case of Abel and Cain, the two sons of Prophet Adam quickly comes to mind. Cain murdered his younger brother, Abel. He became confused as per what to do with the corpse, as he had never seen a dead body before. Allah therefore taught him how to bury the corpse by means of a practical demonstration and a drama between two birds who engaged each other in fierce and serious fighting and this consequently led to the demise of one of the two. The surviving one then dug the ground to make a hole with his claws and beak and finally buried the dead one. Through this, Cain came to understand the modality of burying his deceased brother, and so he emulated the bird.⁸

Another instance is the case of Prophet Ibrahim (A.S) who, despite his faith and knowledge demonstrated the impotence of human knowledge by demanding further education on the possibility of giving life to the dead. To respond to this request, Allah involved him in the experiment by asking him to take four different birds, cut them into pieces and then put a portion of them on every hill. He was then ordered to call them and that the birds would come to him, flying with speed. When Prophet Ibrahim (A.S) performed the experiment, it became known to him that surely everything was possible for Allah.⁹

Apart from the above, all the prophets and Messengers of Allah numbering about 124,000 were by one way or the other taught by Allah, and they were endowed with knowledge for them to accomplish the task given them. Some Prophets were also specially taught and endowed by Allah. For example, Prophet Yusuf was endowed with the knowledge of interpreting dreams,¹⁰ Prophet Daud (A.S) was taught the art of making coats of mail,¹¹ while Prophet Sulayman (A.S) was endowed with the gift of taming wind¹² and knowledge of the language of animals.¹³

To further confirm the role of a teacher as played by Allah, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) said with equanimity: "My Lord taught-educated me and He perfected my training." A form through which Allah used the Prophet to disseminate knowledge is by sending Angel Jibril in human form to the Him. The popular *Hadith* two of An-Nawawi's collection is an example of this. The angel appeared to the Prophet (S.A.W) in form of a man and in the presence of Companions, asked him some questions concerning Islam, *Iman*, *ihsan* and signs of the Last Hour, to which the prophet responded accordingly. The strange man albeit asked him questions and at the same time confirmed the correctness of the responses of the Prophet (S.A.W) to the questions. This amazed the Companions present. When the strange man eventually left, the Prophet (S.A.W) asked his Companions whether they knew the man or not and to which they responded non-affirmatively. The Prophet (S.A.W) then told them: "that was Jibril. He came to teach you your religion."¹⁴

The prophet (S.A.W) himself was a teacher. He used to repeat important things thrice for easy understanding and memorization, while he used to listen to his Companions to confirm what they had learnt. He also encouraged learning and teaching by his utterances which served as incentives for both learners and teachers. He was reported to have said:

*Allah does not give a learned man any knowledge until He takes him a covenant as He took covenant from the Prophets, namely to make it known to the people and not to conceal it.*¹⁵

The Prophetic tradition shows the propinquity in the role of a teacher and a prophet. This is because teacher brings out people from darkness into light just like prophets, and so, teaching becomes a form of worship aiming at imparting necessary skills to ensure meaningful living in this world and attain felicity in the Hereafter. It behoves us to cite a *Hadith* of the prophet (S.A.W) reported by Mu'az ibn Jabal saying:

*Acquire knowledge, because its acquisition is fear of Allah, searching for it is worship, its study is praise, search for it is jihad, teaching it to him who does not know is alms giving, imparting it to those who are worthy is meritorious ...By its help, Allah is obeyed and worshipped, by its help, warning is given, by its help, unity of Allah is understood...*¹⁶

Teachers in the Early days of Islam

Teachers are accorded distinguished position among the Muslims, as they are believed to have been entrusted with the task of educating and training people. In his *Ihya' 'Ulumid-Din*, Al-Ghazali documents the virtues of a teacher quoting some Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions to drive home his point¹⁷. As a mark of respect for a teacher, Az-Zarnuji, in his *Ta'lim*, advises students to shun the habit of walking in front of the teacher, sitting on his seat, initiating a talk before him, and asking questions when the teacher is fatigued. As a mark of veneration for him, Az-Zarnuji urges students to avert the teacher's anger, and that they should not knock on his door but should wait till he comes out. The basis of this veneration is a statement attributed to Caliph 'Ali that "I am a slave to whoever taught me a single letter. He may set me free or enslave me if he chooses."¹⁸ Advancing reasons for this servitude and slavery to the teacher, Oloyede observes:

*The purpose of the servitude was to serve as motivation to the teacher so that the teachers might strive to the utmost to give the best of themselves to the students.*¹⁹

Teachers were not granted any remuneration at the initial stage of Islam. The Prophet's objection to receiving reward either in kind or cash for teaching²⁰ could have been due to the fact that teaching had not been professionalized by then, and nearly every teacher had one occupation or profession while teaching was secondary and general duty of every person. With the involvement of government in education, professionalization of teaching and recruitment of teachers to teach in schools, teaching became a profession and a source of income to those who took to it.

The level as well as the environment at which individual teacher operates determines the respect and honour he commands in the community. The knowledge endowed or acquired by a teacher equally suggests where to operate. Apart from this, a teacher may perform multi-purpose roles in the society. He plays educative, political, judicial, spiritual and religious roles. Before this, he must have faced series of examinations to establish his erudition. An example is that of *Imam* Bukhari who was said to have passed the rigorous test of a panel of ten scholars in Baghdad.²¹ With the privilege and honour accorded a teacher in the Muslim community, he makes sure that he acquires proper mastery of the subject he specializes on, to avoid unnecessary embarrassment from brilliant students. Though teachers operating at higher level depended

mostly on their notebooks for dictation to their students, most of them knew the content of their books or notes by heart in case they might forget to bring them to the lecture hall.²²

It needs to be mentioned that meekness and humility are parts of the qualities of a good teacher in the Muslim community. This encourages cordial relationship between the tutor and the students. It is on record that well-to-do teachers used to render financial assistance to their deserved students. Abu Hamid al-Isfara'ini (d. 406/1014–1015C.E) used to disburse 160 *dinars* monthly for students, while Abu Hanifah was said to have sponsored one of his closest disciples, Abu Yusuf whose father was too poor to finance his education.²³

A Professional Teacher of Islamic Studies

There is hardly a line of demarcation between education and teaching. Elias in his *Qamus* gives the Arabic word for teaching and education as *al-Ta'lim*.²⁴ Whitehead defines education as a process whereby the innate potentialities of the individual is tapped and used for the benefit of individual.²⁵ In their submission, Adeyinka and Adetoro see education as a life-long process that aims at imparting the skill needed to live meaningful lives and for an individual to adjust well to his immediate environment and the ultimate world or universe in which he finds himself.²⁶ In the same vein,, Ojobo and Nwaki define teaching as a conscious effort to bring about a desired change in human learning, abilities and behaviour thereby contributing to a better living of the individual concerned.²⁷ To Chaulan, teaching is a process in which the learner, teacher and curriculum and other variables are organised in a systematic way to attain some pre-determined goal.²⁸ From these definitions, it is clear that the major import of teaching is to educate or impart knowledge or skill to the learner in expectation of certain changes in him.

In the contemporary Nigeria, for a teacher of Islamic Studies to be professionally qualified, he must have been exposed to rigorous professional exercises to possess specialized knowledge and skills. Like others in the same profession, he must have pursued his professional skill in one or more educational institutions to obtain one or more of the following certificates:

- (i) Teachers' Grade Two Certificate
- (ii) Nigerian Certificate in Education (N.C.E)
- (iii) Certificate in Arabic and Islamic Studies
- (iv) Diploma in Arabic and Islamic Studies
- (v) Bachelor of Art in Education and Islamic Studies (B.A. Ed/

- Islamic Studies)
- (vi) Associate Certificate in Education (A.C.E)
- (vii) Postgraduate Diploma in Education (P.G.D.E)

Closely related to the above is that a teacher of Islamic Studies must have been adequately exposed to the practical aspect of the profession which is normally in form of teaching practice and practicability of his religious teachings.

An Islamic Studies teacher must belong to a professional body which sees to the betterment of its members morally, academically and professionally. For example, at the primary and secondary school level, he belongs to the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT). At College of Education level, he belongs to the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) and at the University level, he is a member of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Apart from the umbrella bodies, he needs to belong to his discipline-based professional bodies like the Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS); the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions (NASR) and the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religion and Education (NASRED), to mention a few. These organizations are expected to see to the welfare and professional development of their members by organizing seminars, conferences and workshops.

A teacher of Islamic Studies is looked upon as a potential liberator of humanity from ignorance, barbarism, conflict, servitude, fear and misunderstanding. To a large extent, man's advancement depends on him and so, he belongs to the group of human beings who are more interested in human welfare than they are in personal gain. As such, he should take his profession as a life career and not a stepping-stone to other 'less-rewarding' but lucrative occupations, or else his case may be worsen than that of Jonah who was trying to escape from Allah's plan and was consequently swallowed by a big fish.²⁹ This is not to say that an Islamic Studies' teacher must confine himself to a cage like a bird, rather, his intention for leaving the profession must not be financially motivated. The general belief that teachers' rewards are in heaven should not be thrown into dustbin, because, in addition to the earthly rewards they might have been receiving, a much more durable rewards are awaiting them in the Hereafter if they discharge their duties conscientiously and diligently. At the same time, one has to concur with Az-Zamujj's assertion that a thousand pound is not enough *quid pro quo* for a letter or word taught by a teacher³⁰ as against Imam Ghazali's view that a teacher should seek no

remuneration and neither should he accept reward or thanks for the services he rendered.³¹

Qualities of the Islamic Studies Teacher

Teaching is a complex profession that calls for a large heart. As such, the pendulum of the qualities of a teacher of Islamic Studies revolves round his physiognomy, viz his personality, character, religion and his general disposition. These qualities could also be seen vis-à-vis his subject as a discipline, his students, his methodology as well as his aim of teaching what he is to teach.

Who to teach

This has to do with the personality of the teacher. For convenient sake, this aspect is considered under his character, dressing/physical appearance and his religion.

I. Character:

An effective Islamic Studies teacher must be morally upright, humorous, approachable and favourable to those that come his way. No tittles of idleness must be attributed to him, hence, must be hardworking. He must be seen as a model to be emulated by all. As the Prophet (S.A.W) is regarded as a paragon of virtue due to his excellent moral behaviour,³² the teacher of Islamic Studies must be morally sound. He must be a tee-totaller, not a womanizer who will be chasing his female students around. In short, he must imbibe all the teachings of Islam and make them reflect in his actions. An Islamic Studies teacher is a *Mu'addib* who is supposed to train the mind, body and soul of his students.

Further still, humility and modesty in an Islamic Studies teacher make good result in his teaching. By this, he commands respect from his students and other co-workers. He must not be harsh to his students. "By Allah, I have never met before or after a teacher as affectionate as the Prophet" remarked Muawiah ibn Hakam Salmi.³³

(ii) Dressing and Physical Appearance

Islam enjoins neatness and modesty. When Muhammad (S.A.W) was called into the office of prophethood, he was enjoined to keep his garments free from stain.³⁴ In the same vein, a teacher of Islamic Studies must dress modestly and decently. A male Islamic Studies teacher must be tidy in appearance, cut short his hair, so that he does not look tatty and

disheveled. If female, she must dress Islamically, cover her head and avoid wearing tightly fitting or transparent clothes. The Prophet (S.A.W) is reported to have said:

I will not be a witness for two types of people who are destined for the fire: people with whips like the tails of cows, who beat the people (i.e tyrannical rulers who are the enemies of their own people) and women who, although clothed, are yet naked, seducing and being seduced, their hair styled like the tilted humps of camels. These will not enter the Garden nor will its fragrance even reach them, although its fragrance reaches a very great distance.³⁵

(iii) Religion

One of the vital qualities of an Islamic Studies teacher is that he must be a conscious and practicing Muslim. This is essential in the sense that he is both a spiritual and character developer whose teaching must concur with his belief. A teacher who teaches what he doesn't believe in is but a hypocrite. For someone whose religious tenet teaches trinity for instance, to be teaching *tawhid* which is contrary to his belief will be suicidal. He may also be imparting wrong knowledge to the innocent souls. So, for a non-Muslim to teach Islamic Studies is a sort of contradiction between his teaching and his belief and this could adversely affect his teaching. Suhufi buttresses this when he remarked:

*The secret of the success of the prophets who were the teachers of mankind lay in that, they did themselves what they enjoined others to do and refrained from that which they forbade others to do. They had full faith and confidence in what they said and as their words originated from their hearts they also settled on the hearts of others.*³⁶

Islam contains some rituals which teach one virtue or the other. A teacher who is not a Muslim or a Muslim who is not a practicing one would not be able to experience such virtues and so could not talk from experience. Thus, religion becomes a *sine-qua-non* in the qualities of an effective Islamic Studies teacher.

What to teach

In the word of Sir Ahmadu Bello:

Anyone can construct buildings and call them a university, but without competent and dedicated teaching staff, the correct and accepted international standards cannot be attained. It is the staff who set these standards and maintain them.³⁷

Since no education system can rise above the quality of its teacher,³⁸ what a student can gain or learn from a teacher depends largely on the knowledge of such a teacher. By application, a teacher of Islamic Studies must know what the subject is about and know what's what in it as well. He must be aware that he teaches a subject which is the 'Mother of all subjects' and so must go on wheels in seeking more and more knowledge about the subject. He must as well be thoroughly conversant with modern knowledge including science.

According to Sha'ban, there are four types of knowledge a teacher should have, namely the normative, the causal, the experiential and the general.³⁹ Apart from this, a teacher of Islamic Studies must acquire the knowledge of teaching. This exposes him to various factors militating against teaching and how to combat or manage such factors. His awareness and knowledge of child psychology, child behaviour, techniques of dealing with children and many others like these would help in no small measure to guarantee adequate transmission of knowledge and experience from the teacher to the learner. This is why Good defines a teacher as a person who because of rich or unusual experience or education both in a given field is able to contribute to the growth and development of other persons who come in contact with him; a person who imparts knowledge, a transmitter of virtues, a socializer, a model, a sociologist, a psychologist and above all a moralist.⁴⁰

Whom to teach

No matter how resourceful a teacher is, what determines the degree of success of his work is his ability to know his students. A teacher who doesn't have proper knowledge of his students is likely to be putting a round peg in a square hole and this may not yield expected result. A teacher must be aware that each child has his own characteristics and peculiarity, which make him unique and distinct from others. He is aware that some factors are responsible for certain performance of a child. As such, an effective Islamic Studies teacher must consider the age of his student, and the socio-economic background of the students he teaches. He should understand that the level of education, occupation and income of the parents, together with the size of the family via the number of wives

and children in the family are likely factors that can affect the performances of his children.

Moreover, the teacher of Islamic Studies must know his students from Adam. He must know them by their names and their background. His knowing them also involves knowing their entry behaviour, the amount and nature of prior exposure to the subject and their interest in the subject.

Where to teach

It is an undisputable fact that environmental factor has a lot to do on the teaching-learning process. Environment, according to Emiola and Bojuwoye, is the totality of the social experiences an individual is subjected to, before, during and afterbirth.⁴¹ It then becomes a quality of an effective Islamic teacher to have proper knowledge of the environment where he is to teach. An environment could be rural or urban, densely or sparsely populated, it could be agricultural, industrial, or commercial in nature, and all this could affect his teaching. Hence, the knowledge of the environment would allow him to plan his way and methodology of teaching.

In addition to the above, the parents, siblings, relatives and peer groups are some of the environmental factors that could affect learning and teaching. According to Nakosteen:

The best of nature could be corrupted in a corrupted environment, just as good environment can encourage and sustain the best that is within us, and develop it along proper channels.⁴²

The crux of the matter is that a qualified teacher of Islamic Studies must take into cognizance the environmental factors as they affect learning. He is the one who can link his teaching to his society, draw inferences from the immediate environment and create an environment conducive for learning. This is in line with the assertion of Ibn Jama'ah as quoted by Sha'ban that:

A qualified teacher is one that takes his students to their society and prepares them to live and interact with it. Meanwhile, he is the one who can bring the society to the classroom.⁴³

Why the teaching

This has to do with the objectives of teaching Islamic Studies in schools. According to the National Policy on Education, the objective of

teaching Islamic Studies is to serve as a means of realizing some of the educational goals with particular reference to the following:

- i. the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;
- ii. the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around;
- iii. the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society.⁴⁴

In his attempt to summarize the objectives of Islamic education devoid of parochialism and distorted compartmentalization, Sarwar itemized ten objectives of Islamic Education among which are:

- i. prepare and train the future generation to work as agents of Allah on earth;
- ii. ensure the promotion of *Ma'ruf* (good) and the prevention of *Munkar* (evil) in a society;
- iii. ensure the balanced growth of the personality of a person;
- iv. develop the skills required to enable people to face real-life situations with a clear consciousness about their responsibility and accountability in the *Akhirah*;
- v. prepare people to work towards the economic and material growth of a society with a strong sense of the unity of the human race and ensure distribution and proper use of wealth.⁴⁵

With these, it becomes imperative for a teacher of Islamic Studies to be able to relate these objectives to different topics he teaches. He is expected to be interested in the immediate objectives of instruction and so he should spell out very clearly what the intended outcomes of instruction are. He also has to ensure that the cognitive, affective and psychomotor objectives are taken care of, so that he doesn't neglect one at the expense of others.

How to teach

One of the utmost qualities of a versatile Islamic Studies teacher is that he must be armed to teeth with teaching techniques, styles, methods and modern information and instructional technology devices. A well sophisticated material in the hand of a knowledgeable, articulate and versatile teacher in a suitable environment may produce unsatisfactory result if he lacks proper knowledge of how to present knowledge and information; hence, the teacher of Islamic Studies must have at his disposal many methods of teaching so as to achieve his goals. We cannot

deal with numerous methods of teaching here for space factor. However, we want to stress that no method of teaching is exclusively the best, and that a combination of more than one method of teaching would assist the teacher to achieve his set objectives. We equally want to subscribe to the assertion that the learner-centered method of teaching is the most appropriate method both at the primary and secondary levels of education.

Responsibilities of the Islamic Studies Teacher

The function, role and responsibility of the teacher of Islamic Studies run through the whole spectrum of the society in which he operates. However, due to space factor, we will confine these responsibilities to the classroom or the school environment.

First, he is responsible for the planning of his lesson. As a planner, he makes adequate mental preparation by reading widely so as to teach effectively. He collects facts and information not only from the scripture, but also from books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, biographies, diaries, radio and television. He needs to be computer literate for him to have access to the internet for relevant information about his discipline. It is his responsibility to keep himself abreast with the latest developments in teaching techniques and methods.

As part of his planning responsibility, a teacher of Islamic Studies ensures that he prepares his scheme of work and adheres strictly to them as much as possible. Also, to guide and direct his actions in the classroom, he prepares his lesson plan constantly. In the lesson plan, he clearly states his objectives and maps out strategies to achieve them. As it is usually said, if you fail to plan, then you plan to fail; an unplanned lesson leads to random talks and unrelated facts, producing passive listeners and disinterested students. In other words, lessons are best taught when the necessary preparations are made.

As part of his responsibilities, the teacher of Islamic Studies organizes the resources available in the school for teaching. He organizes his students such that the male students sit separately from the females. He makes sure that the tall students sit at the back of the class, while short ones sit in the front for them to see the chalkboard properly.

It is his responsibility to guide and direct his students. He is a leader who should be a model worthy of emulation, not the type the Qur'an describes thus: "Do you enjoin right conduct on the people and forget (to practice it) yourselves; and yet you study the scripture, will you not understand."⁴⁶ This implies that the teacher of Islamic Studies must see himself as a model being watched not only by his students but also by

colleagues, neighbours and friends. He must realize that any minor mistake made by him will be echoed out more than the major mistake of any other teacher.

The teacher of Islamic Studies as coordinator, co-ordinates the activities of the students. He goes round to see them at work and makes sure that everybody is busy participating in the school activities. He supervises the students in curricular, extra-curricular and different school activities. He supervises the students' observance of *salat* in the school as well.

The teacher of Islamic Studies is not a mere classroom teacher. It is his responsibility to defend the interest of Islam and Muslims. He makes sure that his subject is given its normal status in the curriculum. He cannot afford to see a class fixed during the hours set for observance of *salat*. He will not look kindly to see female students dressing half naked all in the name of cultural dance.

The teacher of Islamic Studies is a judge to the students. He settles dispute among them and decides what is right and what is wrong. While doing this, he delivers his judgment without fear or favour in accordance with the dictate of the Qur'an: "and when you judge between people, that you judge with justice. Verily how excellent is the teaching, which He gives you. For Allah is He who hears and sees all things."⁴⁷

The continuous assessment and evaluation of his students is a responsibility of an ideal Islamic Studies teacher. This would afford him the opportunity of judging the academic performance of his students. The evaluation may be summative, formative or diagnostic. Whichever method he uses, it is the responsibility of the teacher to give the students the feedback of their performances in the assessment.

CONCLUSION

By means of conclusion, the teacher of Islamic Studies is a man of many crowns. He is an educator and subject specialist. He becomes a qualified Islamic educator by virtue of his roles in interpreting, practicing and transmitting Islamic cultural values to the students in particular and the public in general. He combines morality with knowledge and maintains good rapport with his students and his co-workers. He is not the one who is only a Muslim when in Islamic Studies class. He rather practices what he teaches. As a specialist, he develops special interest in his subject, equips himself with the ABC of the subject as well as the complex aspect of it.

He takes his profession as *fard 'ayn* and not *fard kifayah*. He is not

the one that goes on *khalwah* when he is supposed to be in the classroom teaching. He is an honest, hardworking, patient, punctual, accessible, calm, generous, helpful and kind teacher whose action teaches than his words. In short, he is the one who studies the Prophet as a model of an ideal teacher and tries to emulate him in actions, conduct and deeds.

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