

Education and Methods of Teaching in Islam in the Era of Az-Zarnooji

Khaled al-Khalediy

Abstract

Education has always been a major concern of the Muslim peoples. It was launched by the Prophet Muhammad who was not only the preacher of a new religion and the head of the new community, but also an effective teacher and an enthusiastic promoter of learning. Islam is a knowledge-based religion, a religion of the Book. Since Muslim civilization has religion as a unifying factor, it is naturally based on the Qur'an and the tradition (*Hadith*). As soon as the mosque became the place of worship, it also became the first school in Islam and the main place for spreading Islamic education. Education as a profession was approached by the Arabs seriously and with great care. They tried to understand the nature and the capabilities of their pupils and examined the teachers' responsibility for making learning happen.

We know very little about the methods and teaching patterns in pre-medieval and medieval times. Muslim historians have rather concentrated upon political and military activities and neglected social and educational topics. However, there is an important book written in the late twelfth century by a great Moslem who played a major role in the field of education but went unnoticed by most researchers, Burhan ad-Din/al-Islam Az-Zarnooji (hereafter referred to as A-Z) which he developed in his book *Ta'lim al-Muta'llem-Tariq at-Ta'llum* which is in my translation – *Instructing (Teaching) the Learner: Methods of (Self) Learning*, or *Instruction of the Student: The Method of Learning* as quoted in Von Grunebaum and Theodora Abel, 1947, or *Teaching the Learner the Methods of Learning* as quoted in Reda, 1979). In A-Z's small but rich booklet, his educational percepts are well constructed and logically exposed. He stresses the importance of "educational values". Getting his inspiration from the *Qur'an* and considering its value in successful education, the author asserts that thinking is the source and the motivator of achievement. Thanks to the importance of *Instructing (Teaching) the Learner: Methods of (Self) Learning*", A-Z can be considered as one of the fathers of the modern theories of teaching.

Keywords: Education, teaching, educational methods and values, Islamic inspiration.

Introduction

Muslim education was launched by a man, the Prophet Muhammad, who is said to have been illiterate. Yet, as the preacher of a new religion and the head of the new community, he became an effective teacher and an enthusiastic promoter of learning. He emphasized two essential principles of modern education: the idea of life-long education and the need for its democratization, by making it available to Muslim men and women. It has been told that after the battle of *Badr* (623 AD), the Prophet ransomed certain literate war prisoners on condition that they taught reading and writing to children in Medina (Massialas and Jarrar, 1983, p.9). Thus, when the people of Medina asked him to send them a teacher to guide them in understanding the *Qur'an*, he sent Mus'ab Ibn 'Umayr, the first Muslim teacher who was to instruct people outside Mecca. Being an excellent and convincing speaker and a kind and polite man, he made many people love religion (Hamidullah, 1979, p.10).

Islam has always recognized the great value of education. The first verse that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad was "Proclaim! (Or Read): in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Proclaim (or Read): and thy Lord is most bountiful, He Who taught (the use of) the pen" (Qur'an: S.96; V.1-5, Ali, 1946). The essence of Muslim education is the divine revelation in the Qur'an. The Qur'an represents Muhammad not as a teacher of this divine message, but as a teacher who expected no reward for his labour, except from God. In the discharge of his mission, the Prophet provided commentaries on the revelation and also set precedents for the future action of his community. Preaching the new faith was accompanied by two practical educational measures: literate believers were asked to teach the illiterate and only literate preachers were directed to new communities that accepted Islam.

The present study intends to shed some light on Islamic educational thought in general and on methods of teaching in particular. Education has always been a major concern for the Muslim peoples, eager to obey their Prophet's command: "Seek knowledge even if it is in China". Their contribution to art, literature, science and politics in the history of civilization is well known to historians. But this could only have been possible on the basis of a solid and efficient education.

Most of the literature written on Islamic educational thought was designed to deal with general issues such as aims, institutions, teachers, etc. Muslim scholars did not elaborate on the subject of instruction. Teaching and learning were very important in Islamic culture, but no systematic study of the current methods was undertaken. Investigating and describing the educational systems in the history of Islam is therefore an interesting challenge. Islam is a knowledge-based religion, a religion of the Book. The study of that particular culture reveals what the people said and did in every period and every place and how they tried to determine the behaviour of individuals.

The Arab educational system of our days enjoys the privilege of a rich cultural heritage that dates back to the rise of Islam. Since Muslim civilization has religion as a unifying factor, it is naturally based on the Qur'an and the tradition (*Hadith*). The Qur'an proposes the principles which regulate man's life and dictate his behaviour toward God, his fellowmen and his community. It is also a school for ideals like charity, patience, fulfillment of promise, kindness and gratitude to parents. Since all principles of virtue are contained in the Qur'an, the holy book had to be the basis of all education. On the basis of the Qur'an and the practice and pronouncements of Muhammad, scholars have built and developed a whole system of conduct for the individual, the community and the state.

The rationale of this article is an evaluative study of the educational standards of the medieval and pre-medieval era and the reforms suggested by the single work

written in the 12th century on the issue of instruction. We shall hereunder examine in length Az-Zarnooji's book, *Instructing (Teaching) the Learner: Methods of (Self) Learning*, which stresses the issues considered vital in modern education but largely ignored at the time it was written. Very little is known about this author's life and the precise time when he lived. But his teaching methods and patterns are still up-to-date and inspire modern educators. The basic methods recommended in this booklet are teacher-centered and pupil-centered ones, beginning with the approach of preaching and advice already found in the Qu'ran. He advocates the narrative style in order to make a long-lasting intellectual impression on the listener. In the stories "good" as well as the "evil" characters are depicted and the struggle between them. People are thereby taught to control their acts and to behave in a proper way.

A further method used by medieval Muslim teachers and examined by A-Z is the dialogue or debate. This is a conversation with pupils, during which questions are asked to the purpose of drawing their interest and triggering their intellect. According to A-Z, that is only possible when the discussion is held between persons with a just and candid character. A-Z then describes the method of setting parables. The parable is a metaphor which consists in approaching a new topic through an example close to the learner's comprehension. And finally, the author mentions teaching through practice and application and stresses the importance of repetition and dictation.

The importance of a good environment is stressed in A-Z's work, relying on the Prophet's words about the parents' role in shaping a child's character and developing his qualities. A-Z is well aware that learning cannot be acquired only by mechanical aids, or by rules and regulations that do not reflect the drive, aspirations and feelings of the student himself, i.e. without internal motivation.

Though A-Z claims that learning and acquisition of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim, man or woman, his book is wholly dedicated to the teaching of men. In pre-medieval and medieval times, girls were only taught by their fathers and within the family. However, many Muslim women of that epoch are remembered by the breadth of their instruction and were scholars and calligraphers. This trend grew with the passage of time. In the period of Enlightenment, we note the appearance of girls' schools. As Fatima Mernissi has said, Muslim women can walk into the modern world with pride.

Teaching Institutions in Islam

In Islam, two types of teaching institutions existed, formal and informal. Informal education was offered in an indirect manner through community institutions such as mosques, bookshops, scholars' homes and literary salons. As for formal institutions, schools, colleges, libraries and cultural centres were established for the purpose of teaching.

Informal Teaching Institutions

From the very beginning, the mosque became the place of worship and the first school in Islam and it was therefore the main place for spreading Islamic education. As soon as the mosque developed, study circles were set up within it which lasted for years and centuries in various Islamic countries. The mosques were used as political centres, courts of justice and educational institutions. All branches of Islamic science were represented in the mosque. It was the meeting place of all learned men, the place of devotion and study, open to every Muslim.

An important type of education was the instruction given in palaces. Muslim rulers and prominent men had to be taught special skills in order to qualify for future responsibilities. The teacher in the palace was known as a *Mu'addeb* (private tutor) who lived in the palace so as to be close to the children he taught. The

Mu'addeb representing a class of teachers engaged in educating the sons of the higher strata as well as those of princes and Caliphs. The famous al-Kasa'i was a private tutor to the children of Harun al-Rashid (Totah, 1926, pp. 35, 40).

Bookshops also played an important part, especially in adult education. They existed in every city and people used to come daily, not only to buy books but also to hold debates and to exchange views about the books they had read. Under the influence of foreign civilizations, the meeting place of educated people was transformed into a kind of literary salon, and the Caliphs began to equip their palaces with such salons. Some were devoted to science and others to poetry and music. Their contribution to the progress and dissemination of knowledge (Shalaby, 1987, pp.76-99) is far from being negligible.

With the progress of Islamic civilization and the recording of the Arabic and Islamic heritages, the written word became an aid to oral authority. There was a sudden demand for large numbers of literate Arabs to act as clerks and accountants. We then observe the rise of a class of very highly qualified special teachers for the education of princes and sons of the wealthy. At the same time there appeared travelling scholars who crossed the land in the search of the widening range of Arab and Islamic learning. Scholars travelled freely throughout the Islamic world and statesmen passed easily from the service of one prince into that of another (Von Grunebaum, 1969, p.17). According to the sayings of the Prophet Moslems were urged to seek knowledge from the cradle to grave: "Seek knowledge, even if it be in China, for the pursuit of knowledge is obligatory for every Moslem, man or woman". Such sayings by the Prophet reveal two very essential principles of modern education – the concept of life-long education and that of the democratization of education by making it available equally to men and to women (Massialas & Jarrar, 1983, pp.8-9) .

For example, Al-Bayruti (1994) quoted Jaber Ibn Abdullah who said: "I heard about a Hadith (tradition) about one of the Companions of the Prophet, (Peace Be Upon Him). I bought a camel and prepared myself and travelled to him for a whole month till I arrived in al-Sham (Syria) and came to his house. I said to him: 'It reached me that you heard about a Hadith from the Messenger of God, (PBUH), on the topic of complaints and justice which I did not hear about'. He said: 'I heard the Messenger of God, (PBUH) saying : God crowds the worshippers/people, and pointed his hand towards al-Sham [Syria], bare [undressed] and barefooted [without having anything or any deformity]' (al-Bayruti, 1994, pp. 84-86).

Ibn Shihab quoted Ibn Abbas who said: "When a Hadith from one of the Companions of the Prophet, (PBUH), reached me, I could ask him to come to me and tell me about it if I wanted, but I used to go to him and stay at his door till he would come out and tell me" (Ibid).

Malik Ibn Yahya Ibn Saeed quoted Saeed Ibn al-Musayyab who said the following:

"I used to walk nights and days seeking one single Hadith". He also quoted Qays Ibn 'Ubada who said: "I travelled to al-Madinah to seek knowledge and honour" (Ibid).

All these were minorities, as were also the seekers of enlightenment who associated with the "circles" (*Halaqas*) of learned men held in the mosques (Subh, 1993, Vol.1, pp. 294-297; Ash-Sharabasi, Vol. 3, pp. 299 -303). These scholars discussed religious subjects such as the *Qur'an*, the prophetic tradition (*al-Hadith*), prophetic customs (*sunnah*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), as well as mathematics and sciences (Massialas & Jarrar, 1983, pp.10-11). Some of them became so well known that students travelled from far and near to join their circles and to learn from them. But for all that, one had to acquire a facility in reading and writing. In the first four centuries of Islam this could only be done in the *Maktab* that

remained the only universal institution where these skills could be acquired (Ibid; al-Bayruti, 1994, pp. 116-119).

The development of Muslim education continued to be important in the Arab world where centres for translation and research were established. Scholars began to be invited with full stipends to come to study and further the cause of knowledge. Education became fully institutionalized and public education was given in the mosque centres and the *Kuttab*s. Students attending the *Kuttab* could stay in school as long as they needed to achieve what their teacher thought they were capable of achieving.

Learned religious scholars, the '*Ulamas*, lectured students gathered around them in religious subjects such as the *Qur'an* and the prophetic tradition, but also in mathematics and the sciences. The theory of education was based on the works of many scholars. As time went on, a new approach appeared which took into consideration the learner's behaviour and capability. The Messenger referred to the factor of good environment, e.g., "Each one is born by one nature..." ('Ulwan, 1994, vol. 1, p. 162) In Froebel's thinking and in the language of natural upbringing, children were to be nurtured rather than educated. Froebel's essential assumption was that children need space and freedom to develop according to their true nature (Hamilton, 1992, P. 84). The psychological approach to education that was developed rested on three main factors: the foundation of the educational process, the instructional process, and finally on education as a profession (Qambar, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 36-43). The educators of early Islam asserted that successful learning depends on the readiness of the learners, on their interest, and on their motivation to learn (Massialas & Jarrar, 1983, p. 12; Subh, 1993, Vol. 1, pp. 314-315, 376). Arab educators at that time realised that language as an educational tool may affect the cognition of learners and that the delivery system and methods of education were essential in helping the learners reach the levels of understanding and knowledge required (Redha, 1979, p. 218). In this respect, Arab

educators asked the teachers to make sure that the knowledge they shared with their students was presented at a level compatible with their thinking and ability to understand. The students' maturity and language ability should be observed and the teacher should start with simple concepts and then move on to more complex ones, drawing as much as possible on the student's experience and knowledge (Massialas & Jarrar, 1983, p.12).

Education as a profession was approached by the Arabs seriously and with great care. They tried to understand the nature and the capabilities of their pupils and examined the teacher's responsibility for making learning happen (Ibid, p.13). We may say with certitude that the education of the majority remained firmly in the hands of the theologians. Mystics and philosophers also resorted to teaching in order to propagate their ideas and achieved a considerable measure of success.

Fifth century Islam saw the rise of a new institution for adult education known as *al-Madrasa*, i.e. the school. Teachers in the new institutions became civil servants, paid by the state. Students received free tuition and sometimes even free lodging and food. As to the teaching methods, the oral tradition was preserved and at all levels teachers continued to rely on recitation and oral exposition and pupils on learning by rote. Allowing for doctrinal differences, the new institutions had a similar curriculum of religious studies, such as exegesis, theology and jurisprudence, along with Arabic studies.

Formal Teaching Institutions

Though we are rather well informed about the methods and teaching patterns in later time, we unfortunately possess very little information about those used in the first years of the Islamic civilization. Muslim historians seem to have concentrated upon political and military activities and neglected social and educational topics. The only aspect that held their attention was that of the "higher learning" institutions, such as the University and *Madrasa* in Medieval Islam (Al-Makdisi,

1991, pp. 296-311). But in whatever concerns the education of the children and adolescents we remain generally in the dark. *Al-Kuttab*s were the main place for teaching the new Islamic religion and encouraging people to read and write. There were two kinds of *Kuttab*s: one that taught literacy, mostly in scholars' homes, and one that taught the Qur'an, mostly in Mosques. The schools in Mosques were also called *Al-Masjed*.

Another Muslim education centre was the library. The Muslims of the Middle Ages were aware of the importance of the librarians' role in scientific work, and they selected the best scholars to be librarians. Those who worked in Islamic libraries were librarians, translators or copywriters, and books were required to be written beautifully, in a harmonious style. There were also bookbinders and cleaners.

We must also refer to cultural centres (*Majles al-'ilm/al-adabs*) which attracted scientists and writers and served to spread knowledge and culture (al-Isfahani, 1970, Vol. 3, p. 129) and for teaching astronomy as well as other sciences. Astronomy sprang from the interest in astrology, and Arab interest in stars began at a very early date in their history. Stars were used as a compass guide and as indicators of unusual events. Astronomers made important measurements and calculations and wrote treatises on weather prediction (Totah, 1926, pp. 9-10), the surface of the moon, and the space between the stars (Subh, 1993, Vol. 2, pp. 138-139, 419-420; Vol. 1, pp. 244-246; Shalaby, 1986, pp. 70-74).

Hospitals for teaching medicine were built in many places in the Islamic Empire such as Baghdad, Aleppo, Hamat, Homs, and Damascus where people could receive medical attention (Totah, 1926, pp.7-8). There were no hospitals or medical schools like we have today. Hospitals were simple and primitive institutions held by men who were not qualified as physicians but knew how to treat patients with herbs and plants. Students learned from these healers by accompanying them

during their daily rounds. While waiting for their turn to be treated, patients would hold debates and discussions, which contributed to the propagation of culture and knowledge. In the hospitals, there were *Iwans* (large halls) where students listened to lectures, examined patients, diagnosed the disease and recommended treatment. Hospitals were common in the Islamic world such as the Bimaristane or Dar ash-Shefa' in Damascus. Ibn Jubayr, the famous traveller of the twelfth century, stated that Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi founded hospitals in Alexandria for students and appointed physicians to treat them free of charge (Ibn Jubayr, 1907, p. 10).

Methods of Education and Teaching in Islam

What were the methods of teaching and instruction in Islam and how did the *Qur'an* deal with these methods and in what style? Was the teaching teacher-centered or pupil-centered? A-Z studied the different methods, and even alludes to the education of women, a subject most neglected in those times.

In those days the purpose of education was to spread religion by enabling people to read the *Qur'an*. As Ibn Khaldoon (1332-1406 AD) says: "The *Qur'an* is the principle of all religious education", including reading and writing (Subh, 1993, Vol. 1, pp. 356-357, 429). While in the first years of the Islam, there were private teachers who only taught the children of the Caliphs and other wealthy pupils, in the Abbasid era (750-1258) scholars became widely appreciated by society. Scholars sought higher education to gain high status and respect, but they also worked in small jobs to earn a living. For example, the poet Abu al-'Atahiya was a ceramic artist, al-Jahiz was a bread seller and fishmonger and al-Ghazali's name refers to his father's job as a worker in the production of woolen clothes (Ahmad, 1989, p.39). A-Z stated that "in the ancient time" teaching was free: "In ancient times people learned handicrafts, then they pursued the study of knowledge so that they did not desire the possessions of men" (Ibid, p.147).

However, when Islam spread, education and teaching became established and the teachers began to earn money. Since the mosque, the first educational center for the study of the *Qur'an* and religious thought, was not a suitable place for children, separate institutions, *Kuttabs*, were established for them. When A-Z wrote his book, organized education was at a high level.

From that time on, the importance of education and the pursuit of knowledge were emphasized in the Islamic faith. At first imitation was the common method of education. The child who saw his parents read the holy *Qur'an* and observe religious rites was supposed to pick up these activities and repeat them. Islam's pedagogical approach of the pre-medieval and medieval ages was an almost completely religious approach, as was likewise the case in those times in the Christian West. A-Z refers largely to pleasures derived from doing one's duty to the Islamic religion. But he also noted that learned men have fame and that their learning continues to live after they die, and they are remembered as important people.

In the pre-medieval periods, the traditional method of teaching prevailed. Learning was based on recitation and on the teacher's personal style and his ability to explain and interpret the texts as well as the pupil's ability to memorize them. The *Qur'an* had to be memorized by every child. The extensive use of memory was an important feature of the Arab learning method. Repetitions and memory drills were recommended and frequently used.

Modern researchers assert that Islamic scholars were interested in methods of teaching both young and adult Muslims.

Those methods were a function of the following criteria:

- a. Subject
- b. Teacher and scholars
- c. Place of teaching

d. Age of student

A-Z explains that the teaching methods differed according to these criteria. The methods used to teach the *Qur'an* were not the same as the ones used to teach science, and the teachers differed in their way of instruction depending on their knowledge and preparation. The motivation of the student, his readiness to absorb new material was another reason to choose one or another method, and A-Z states that the teacher must get to know the student in order to give the best educational guidance. He also asserts that teaching children is different from adult education (Ahmad, 1989, p.114).

The teaching methods were derived, in essence, from the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*, i.e. tradition. A-Z therefore advises potential teachers to preach with consideration and circumspection: "I commend to you in the composing of your speech five things, if you are obedient to him who makes recommendation to you meaning you well. Do not neglect the purpose of the discourse, the time, its quality (how to speak, in low voice or loudly, quietly...), its quantity (in condense manner) and its place" (Ahmad, 1989, p.114).

The Muslims were concerned about the learning climate that accompanies the teaching process. In order to achieve better learning and results, suitable study times and places had to be chosen. As to the age at which children should start to be taught, he recommended the days of early youth and adolescence. The *Qur'an* urges its believers to cultivate learning and reasoning through constant exhortations, demanding that they know, see, observe, ponder and deduce. Muslims believe that God sent his messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, to be an example to people and to develop Islamic education, and A-Z stated that in the Prophet's sayings there is no limit to learning. But he also observes that the Messenger never recommends a fixed style for teaching. The teacher may switch from narration to dialogue, from interrogation to the setting of parables.

Taking A-Z's book as a basis, we shall try here to offer an insight on the several methods of education that can be found in the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna*. Methods like education through preaching and counseling or direct commandment were teacher-centered. These are the oldest methods. With the lapse of time there appeared newer methods, like the style of debate, the dialogue, the narrative style and the setting of parables, which were pupil-centered. A-Z observes that in the *Qur'an* every way of teaching was teacher-centered and based on the assumption that the *Qur'an* was the teacher, under the dictation of God who revealed how to act and behave. The Prophet Muhammad is considered the first teacher in Islam. He was a very able teacher who wanted his pupils to be active and learn and do things by themselves. In this he was an innovator and established new bases for Muslim teaching.

Education by Preaching, Advice and Commandment

The basic method recommended in the Qur'an consists in preaching and advice. This has the most influence on the child's development from a religious, behavioural, psychological and social point of view. The educators must understand that the sensitivity of the child to preaching is great, since his heart is still innocent and not corrupted. In his book, A-Z also examines the preacher's style and his advice to the learner is: "Ask advice in all matters and be firm and exert patience with his teacher"

(Ahmad, 1989, pp. 100, 102). He also says: "It is necessary to choose ...to ask advice in all matters" (Ibid, pp. 98, 100). He even utters a series of commandments to the teacher and to the learner. An interesting point of view is the following:

"Know that it is not obligatory for every Muslim, man of woman, to seek all aspects of learning, but only that in keeping with his situation in life ('Ilm al-Hal)" (Ibid, p.83). A-Z also proclaimed that: "It is necessary in the quest for learning not to neglect the properties and usage of the Prophet" (Ibid, p. 166), and that: "It is

necessary in the quest of knowledge to be on one's guard against shameful traits of character..."(Ibid, p. 115). These assumptions mean that teaching was not only knowledge, but also had a behavioural and moral aspect.

The *Qur'an* gives a lot of advice concerning learning. Here are some commandments: "God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and forbids all shameful deeds and injustice and rebellion. He instructs you that ye may receive admonition" (*Qur'an*: S.16; V. 90, Ali, 1946). God almighty made it the responsibility of Islamic society to bring up its children by ordering them to do good and forbid them to do wrong: "Let there arise out of you a band of people who stand for all that is good, enjoining you to do what is right and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity" (*Qur'an*: S.3; V.104, Ali, 1946). "Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing" (Ibid, V. 110).

Teaching by Repetition (Tikrar)

Preaching needs to be supported by repetition. Whenever Allah's messenger spoke, he repeated the words thrice, so that they might be fully understood. A-Z spoke of the amount to be repeated at any one time, thus defining the repetition method, called *tikrar* and its technique. The student should count and measure for himself the amount of repetition he needs. A-Z stated that "the quest of knowledge is among the most exalted and difficult tasks" (Ahmad, 1989, p.101). He therefore urged the learners to cultivate learning and reasoning so as to acquire the knowledge already owned, according to the Qur'an, by biblical figures such as Noah, David, Solomon and Moses.

Islam has used effective styles to produce divine emotions in man and to train the human mind. The whole universe absorbed the light of Islamic culture during its years of glory and the Islamic nation led the other nations to the light of knowledge and the supremacy of morality (An-Nahlawi, 1979, pp. 184-185). This

occurred thanks to the superior methods of teaching using a variety of styles, and these methods of education can be found in the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna*.

The Qur'an recommended education through the persuasive approach of preaching and advice. This guidance can be done if the soul is pure, the heart is open, and the intellect is good. The educators must understand this as being most important in the education of children, and prepare the young ones for their psychological and social development, leading them towards behavioural and mental maturity.

The Narrative Method

Another very effective method of teaching described by A-Z is the narrative style. This consists in telling a story, thus making long-lasting intellectual impressions on the listener by the liveliness, the conclusion and the message of the narrative. The *Qur'an* uses this style especially in the stories of the apostles and their peoples. The Qur'anic stories include psychological evidence of the power and the comprehensiveness of Islam: "God granted his messenger Muhammad the best of stories and gave him the best *Hadith* so that the people would have an oracle and lesson, and the Prophet would have resolution and stability" ('Ulwan, 1994, Vol.2, pp. 661-669).

The educational characteristics of the prophetic stories are their ability to draw the reader in and catch his attention. A-Z quoted stories such as *Harun al-Rashid*, the Caliph and *al-Asma'i* and the tale of *Yahya* and that of *Dhu al-Qarnayn*, who is represented on his coins with two horns on his head because he considered himself a son of Jupiter Ammon (who had the horns of a ram) (Muruj ad-Dahab, 1989, Vol. 1, pp. 249-250). *Dhu al-Qarnayn* wished to make an expedition in order to become master of the East (rising of the sun) and the West (reaching the setting of the sun- west of Macedonia), and he become master of the East and West, there for he called *Dhu al-Qarnayn*. Once he consulted learned men and asked: "Why

do I make an expedition for such an amount of empire? For verily, the world is small and perishable and rule of the world is a contemptible affair. So this expedition is not a noble way to exert oneself". But the learned men said: "Make the expedition in order that you may have possession of the present and the future world." He then replied: "This is good" (Ahmad, 1986, pp. 122-123). Now the world of Islam in general has accepted Alexander the Great, 356-323 B.C as the one meant by the epithet *Dhu al-Qarnayn* (Ath-Tha'alebi, 2003, Ch. Four). But some of our 'Ulamas have raised doubts about it and made other suggestions. One is that it was an earlier pre-historic king contemporary with Abraham; because they say, *Dhu al-Qarnayn* was a man of faith (Qur'an, S. 18, V. 88, 98). *Dhu Al-Qarnayn*, literally means "the Two Horned One", the King with the Two Horns, or the Lord of the Two Epochs (Ali 1946, Qur'an, Appendix vii, pp. 760-765).

Who was he? The Qur'an gives us no material on which we can base positive answer. Nor is it necessary to find an answer, as the story is treated as a parable (Ath-Tha'alebi, 1999, pp. 61, 241). Popular opinion identifies *Dhu al-Qarnayn* with Alexander the Great. An alternative suggestion is an ancient Persian king, or a pre-historic Himyarite King. *Dhu Al-Qarnayn* was a most powerful king, but it was God, Who in His universal Plan, gave him power and provided him with way and means for his great work (for the story of *Dhu Al-Qarnayn*, see Ali, 1946, pp. 753-757, Qur'an, S.18, V. 83-98, Appendix vii, pp. 760-765).

In his teaching, A-Z used stories from the *Qur'an* and the Prophet's life and relates narratives of his companions and followers. The Qur'anic story is an instrument for conveying the Islamic message. It differs from the legend, since its main aim is not telling a tale, but in strengthening a Muslim's belief and to educate him in correct and moral conduct. They usually imply a dilemma which is solved in favour of the believer who wins by his faith in God. They are a dramatic and intellectual tool for the teacher who can adjust the exposition of the narrative to a style that suits the mentality of the audience.

An-Nahlawi (1979, pp. 210-217) explains the educational character of the Qur'anic and prophetic stories by the fact that the story draws the reader in, arrests his attention and makes him think what the story means. The reader or the listener follows the story and is impressed by its characters and themes, the role of which is to impart to him new knowledge and a sterling moral education.

The Dialogue Method

A further method used by medieval Muslim teachers and examined by A-Z is the dialogue. This is a conversation with the pupils, during which questions are asked to the purpose of drawing their attention and triggering their intellect. According to A-Z,

"The usefulness of posing questions (debate) and discussing is greater than the usefulness of sheer repetition, since in this there is repetition and one more element. It is said: posing questions (debate) for an hour is better than a month of repetition" (Ahmad, 1989, p. 140).

This conversation between two or more persons in the form of question and answer is held on a specific subject. However, A-Z warns that it is only possible when the discussion is conducted between persons with a just and candid nature. Not always does one of persons persuade the other to his opinion, but even then a message is forwarded and is examined by the listener.

Several ways exist to make the dialogue interesting:

- a) Arousing emotions and feelings is possible by introducing the subject in a lively and realistic way.
- b) Enticing the learner to follow the discussion so that he will know the conclusion.

According to A-Z, the interrogative dialogue is one of the successful ways to persuade some of the intellectuals to enter Islam. This is what the author quotes in his book:

"And indeed *Abu Hanifa* used to study by propounding questions and discussing them in his shop" (Ahmad, 1989, p. 143). He finds this method to be a successful and most emulated one. It is very persuasive and forces the rival to accept the proofs offered to him. He also advises the use of the debate method in the following words:

"Discuss with people subjects of learning in order that you may live. Do not keep yourself away from the enlightened. It is necessary to pursue knowledge by means of discussion, argument and questioning" (Ahmad, 1989, pp. 138-139.).

In his quest for teaching ways and styles, A-Z singles out the method of setting parables. This method, also utilized in other religious scriptures, such as the Bible and the Buddhist texts, has been brought to perfection by Qur'an teachers in the medieval and pre-medieval eras. It consists in approaching a new topic through an example close to the learners' comprehension or within their range of experience, by setting a parable or, in other words, drawing a comparison. The Messenger used this method and the word "parable" literally means "example" or "comparison".

Teaching by Setting Parables

The parable is a kind of metaphor, like the use of a "donkey" to symbolize a trivial and disgusting creature which carries huge tomes (heavy books) on its back but does not understand them. This comparison has been used in the Qur'an where it stands for people who falsify the signs of God. They merely became like beasts of burden that carry learning and wisdom on their backs but do not understand or profit by it. The Qur'anic description is: "The similitude of those who were charged with the (obligations of the) law, but who subsequently failed in those

(obligations), is that of a donkey which carries huge tomes (but understand them not). Evil is the similitude of people who falsify the Sign of God: And God guides not people who do wrong” (Qur'an: S. 62 (Jumu'a); V. 5, Ali, 1946). The special theme here is the need for mutual contact in the community for worship and understanding: for the spirit of the Message is for all, ignored and learned, in order that they may be purified and may learn wisdom (Ibid, p. 1544).

Another example offered by A-Z concerns the medical science, when he states:

"The study of the science of medicine is allowed because it deals with accidental causes. Therefore its study is allowed" (Ahmad, 1989, p. 90).

And to set a parable, he remarks that "the Prophet treated himself medically"(ibid).

The Messenger of God took the Qur'an as an example for his own conduct, and his morality was that of the Qur'an. His companions took him as an example in response to God's saying. This method of acting as a role model is one of the most successful ways of approaching Islam education with all its factors, styles and aims.

The Prophet also advised talking to the people according to their level of intelligence. This is a modern educational issue, putting the student in the center of the learning situation and giving him the leading role. The curriculum has to be built around the students' needs and interests. It is therefore clear that the parables were not a mere artistic work, but had educational and psychological aims.

According to A-Z, the educator should achieve these aims by relying on Qur'anic parables for everyday situations and school activities, and by commenting on them by a description of their social and behavioural results. These parables help to better understand the meaning of the commandment, to cultivate divine emotions, and to train the mind in correct thinking and sound logical reasoning.

In Islamic education, setting an example is a most successful method in teaching others. The teacher must set an example by making his actions agree with his precepts. In connection with this, the Prophet set an example in several fields, such as good morals, worship, generosity, modesty and clemency. In his book, A-Z states that is necessary for the seeker of knowledge to ask advice in all matters, and he sets a parable that: "God commanded even his Messenger to ask counsel about all of his affairs" (Ahmad, 1989, p. 100).

Though set in early days by the Prophet, this method is a modern educational issue. The parables are not a mere artistic work giving the teacher's speech a rhetorical glamour. It has educational and psychological aims, easing the comprehension and training the mind in correct thinking and sound reasoning. The Islamic educator should achieve his aims by an abundant use of Qur'anic parables and by commenting them in the spirit of his teachings.

Teaching Through Practice and Application

In A-Z's study of the learning system, a great importance is ascribed to teaching through practice and application. Teaching by the method of application affects the soul and confirms knowledge. A-Z's study shows that activities and practices are strongly and reciprocally connected with all the elements of learning. Learning activities cannot be separated from content, aims and motivation, because activities result from motivation and lead to it. Activities can cure laziness and stave off boredom. They are not conditions that lead to learning; they are learning in itself and form part of its aims and targets. Thus, comprehension activities are not different from comprehension but are comprehension itself.

As emphasized in A-Z's book, learning is working with (Ahmad, 1989, p.98). That means that learning is working, as activities are learning. In the opinion of some educators, lectures should be replaced by class exercises in which there is a large share of student participation (Knowles, 1986, p.37). Learning by practice

and application was already for the medieval teacher a condition for accurate learning and its acceptance by God. The students see the things that they learn in a more detailed way. Quoting *Abu Hanifa*, A-Z said that: "The purpose of learning is to act by it, while the purpose of action is the abandoning of the perishable for that which lasts forever" (Ahmad, 1979, p. 91).

This means that, according to A-Z, the teacher must educate his students to achieve in their life the principles learned from him. For this purpose, he should ask them questions about real life and make sure they apply the received education in their individual and social life.

The Prophet's methods of teaching included the practice and repetition. He used to pray while standing on the rostrum and his companions prayed after him. This was an example of the modeling and practicing method. According to the *Hadith*, the learner should repeat the reading after hearing it, so that the teacher might correct him if he makes a mistake. A-Z explains this as follows: "It is important that the student exert himself strenuously to understand what is offered by the teacher, applying both intelligence and meditation as well as repetition" (Ahmad, 1989, p.137). He also says that: "After the student understands and repeats the material, the student should reflect, meditate, and continuously pose questions to his teachers and his colleagues so as to get a firm grasp of what he is doing" (Von Grunebaum, 1947, p .9).

One suggestion was that the student should learn whatever he could remember after two repetitions of the material (Ibid, p.8-9). The teacher should also care to make learning easy, not complicated. This principle is applied by the Messenger in his preaching. In fact, Muslim education urges the teacher to facilitate and not complicate things. Therefore, the Prophet's Friday preaches were not long. They only consisted of a few easy words.

An example of learning by "application" and "practice" is given by the way the Prophet's companions learned to perform ablution and corrected each other. The books of *Hadith* quote some of these methods. According to the tradition, the learner must repeat the reading after hearing it, so that the teacher can correct him if he makes a mistake. The practical and actual side of the educators' work should be more important than the theoretical one. Pupils must grow up with practical thinking, which makes them like their work and respect other workers. This principle, used in modern education, appears in the Messenger's speech and deeds, as related by A-Z.

We however observe that A-Z does not talk about the acquiring of motor skills, or motor learning. This side of learning was not valued at his time, as stated by 'Uthman, (1989, p.99). Worship, including prayers and alms, fasting and pilgrimage is the topic of the pre-medieval and medieval teacher's work as defined by A-Z.

Teaching by the Dictation Method

A further method of teaching emphasized in A-Z's time is the dictation. This consists in bringing up the child to have noble traits and morals. A good environment and an Islamic education will give the child the highest of spiritual virtues and personal noble traits. This was stressed in more than one *Hadith*: "It is better for someone to educate his son than to give a measure of charity". "The best thing that a father can give his son is good manners". "Teach your children and family goodness and give them good manners" (at-Tabrizi, 1990, Vols. 1, 2). According to A-Z dictation was one of the methods of that time: "I shall dictate to you some of the things of which knowledge consists. Since the learned man is held in honour through his knowledge, knowledge of the law is the most worthy of honour" (Ahmad, 1989, pp.128-130). For him, the way to attain knowledge is to have an inkstand on hand on every occasion, in order to write down items of

scientific interest. Making notes rather than relying on memory is an important way of learning.

The Importance of Good Environment in Teaching

The importance of a good environment is stressed in A-Z's work, relying on the Prophet's words about the parents' role in shaping a child's character and qualities.

A-Z's view can be compared with that of Avicenna (d. 1037) who said:

"A child should have in his class children whose manners are good and whose habits are satisfactory, since the child who listens to his friend is affected by him and feels fine with him". Al-Gazali's chief remedy, however, was: "The keeping of boys away from evil companions" ("*asl ta'dib al-sibyan al-hifz min qurana' al-su*") (Totah, 1926, p. 64). And, in A-Z's words: "In being abstinent, one must avoid associating with corrupt people and those who are sinful. One must also choose the upright as one's neighbours" (On Choosing a Good Partner, *ash-Sharik as-Salih*, Ahmad, 1989, pp. 103-104, 165).

In the eyes of the Messenger, as reported by A-Z, a good family environment means the presence of good Muslim parents who shape the child into a pious and honest Muslim. However, in much later times, a new view of childhood emerged. This was, in Europe, the Enlightenment era during which every child was considered to be born in a natural, innocent state and thereafter made evil by the neglect of society. This point of view was expressed in Rousseau's *Emile* (1762), claiming that "God makes all things good; and man meddles with them and they become evil" (Hamilton, 1992, p.84). So children should be trained, but as plants rather than as soldiers. This does not contradict A-Z's theories, since he also thinks that the child should be influenced but not forcibly trained and receive a pupil-centered education. A-Z is well aware that learning cannot be acquired only by

mechanical aids and by rules and regulations that do not reflect the drive, aspirations and feelings of the student himself, i.e. without internal motivation.

The Prophet's sayings asserted that there is no limit to learning. In A-Z's words: "It is obligatory for the student not to be occupied with anything else but knowledge and never turn away from learning" (Ahmad, 1989, p. 152). He also urges life-long learning, referring to Muhammad's traditions according to which: "Wisdom is for the good of the believer, and he must seek it irrespective of its source" (Ibid). And also: "The survival of Islam depends on knowledge and the ascetic life and piety are not perfect where there is ignorance" (Ibid, p. 92-93).

To summarize, A-Z was an educated man, who acquired knowledge and education in many fields and not only on religious matters. The fact that he devoted a whole book to the issue of learning and teaching makes him rightfully one of the fathers of general didactics and the theory of teaching.

The Contribution (Value) of A-Z's Booklet to Education

Though most of our knowledge on these topics remains hazy and only based on superficial recollections, an important scholar has however left us a book written in the late twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century. This book is a unique example of the work of a great Moslem who played a major role in the field of education but went unnoticed by most researchers (Al-Khaledi, 2002, p. 12).

We refer here to the educational theory of Burhan Ad-Deen/al-Islam Az-Zarnooji, developed in his book *"Instructing (Teaching) the Learner: Methods of (self) Learning"*. A-Z was a teacher and educator, and also an Imam. Very little is known about this teacher's life, we even do not know in what town he was born. However, his name may be attributed to a city called *Zurnouj*, somewhere in Persia, near Khorasan. Another version relates to a city named *Zarnaj*, the

prosperous capital of Sidjistan, that was destroyed during the invasion of Tamer Lane (*Taymur Lenk*), in 785 AH (Anno Hegirae).

We know as little about the time of his life. Despite the lack of information, it is however probable that he lived between the end of the sixth century and the early years of the seventh century of Hegirae. During this period, two events had a great influence on the Arab and Islamic civilization, the Mongol occupation and the Crusades. Both events deeply affected the Muslim nations and demanded not only military awareness but also a cultural one, so that science, art, economics and agriculture were to be developed besides the early Islamic roots. Here we recognize A-Z's role and influence. He was not a well-known writer or poet: his only work ever mentioned is this best selling book about learning and education.

"Instructing (Teaching) the Learner: Methods of (Self) Learning" is a scientific book, a production of Islamic education as defined by its author who was certainly a typical educator and an expert on educational heritage. A-Z believed that the learner should learn how to learn by himself and he investigated the different methods used to attain this goal. Before A-Z's time, the educators of early Islam had already understood that successful learning depended on the readiness of learners, on their interests and on their motivation to learn (Massialas & Jarrar, 1983, p. 12). This point has been stressed by A-Z who says: "The pleasures of knowledge, learning and insight are sufficient incentive for intelligent men to acquire knowledge" (Ahmad, 1989, p. 131).

However, this pleasure is much depending on the way of acquiring the knowledge. There is also a suitable time for study. In A-Z's eyes, the earlier and later parts of the night allow the most fruitful learning (Totah, 1926, p. 36).

After this brief insight into the history and the methods of education and the contribution of A-Z thereto, we should examine the value of his book, *"Instructing (Teaching) the Learner: Methods of (Self) Learning"*, that has given us so much

information on these topics. This booklet, the only work of A-Z that has been preserved, is a small pamphlet that shows learners the moral characteristics of the seeker of learning. It is mostly a collection of quotations by earlier authors, well chosen and presented in an interesting way. Though most of the authors quoted belong to the *Hanafi* school, the book has no relation to any specific doctrine. A-Z formed an authentic educational view, influenced neither by the *Hanafi* nor by any other doctrine.

History has recognized A-Z's knowledge, but has rather ignored him as a man. In A-Z's eyes too, doing justice to a man's learning is more significant for him than doing justice to him as a person. The history of man's learning is the history of his internal life, his reality and the essence of his existence.

In this small but rich booklet, the educational percepts of the author are well constructed and logically exposed. A-Z had learned some of these skills from his religious teachers through dictation, and some from previous educational works. He practiced them through his professional life until he became known by these skills and his educational theories.

The subject of this treatise called "*Instructing (Teaching) the Learner: Methods of (self) Learning*" is a description of the route that the learner and the teacher should take for learning. To be able to achieve the constructive cultivating purpose of learning, it is necessary to make no mistakes on the educational path. That is why A-Z explained in detail the advised methods. He looks at these methods in a realistic perspective, related to the characteristic of the learner. According to this author, the learner is a student who committed to Islam as a pure faith and permanent worship, keeps his psychological and educational virtues, knows how to choose his teacher and highly values the discipline he elected. He is dedicated to educational achievement, is patient and inquisitive and is devoid of moral, psychological and social vices. Willing to benefit from educational methods to

develop his aptitudes for research and meditation, this exemplary student depends on God in every scientific step he takes.

The second perspective considered by A-Z is that of "educational values". When we examine the subjects of his chapters, we encounter educational rules in every content. The book comprises thirteen chapters, each of which includes educational thoughts, values and rules. Despite its small number of pages, it has become a prominent book on education and teaching, characterized by its clarity of vision and originality of value. A-Z never misses a chance to emphasize the necessity of taking care of the mind and benefiting from its capacities.

Getting his inspiration from the Qur'an and considering its value in successful education, A-Z stresses the importance of meditation, as a virtue and as a basis. Thinking is the source and the motivator of achievement. Thought must be free from personal materialistic motives and involve a great effort. In A-Z's words: "The learner should expand great effort on learning, so he should not waste it on this lowly life" (Ahmad, 1989, pp. 117, 158).

Thinking also involves an exchange of views and consultations for the choice of one's teachers, companions and the town in which to study. Says A-Z: "Seeking education is one of the most difficult things, therefore, consultation on it is important and necessary" (Ibid, p.149), and also: "Those who seek education should indulge in discussions, debate and argumentation. He should do that through justice, patience and meditation" (Ibid, p. 139).

The diligent student should also avoid carelessness in understanding. He should not be forced to memorize something he does not understand and not write what he is not sure of, but make the effort to grasp the topic before he assimilates it.

The structure of A-Z's book embodies several disciplines within one educational framework and emphasizes a scientific educational truth. Other scholars before A-Z used their intellectual abilities and thoughts to construct educational views. A-Z

owned two complementary abilities: a scientific ability that made him achieve the high degree of *Sheikh of Islam* , and his knowledge of several branches of sciences. He tried to point out the most important aspects of those sciences, to the purpose of applying this philosophy in his intellectual and educational work.

Being an educator and jurist scholar (*faqih*), A-Z expressed also his opinions on education from a legal point of view (Hamdan et al., 1989, p. 215). He believed that acquiring knowledge and education was affected by four rules concerning individual and collective duty. Those were:

- a) The condition of the individual and his work
- b) Studying science with caution
- c) Learning the conditions of the heart
- d) Learning good manners (Ahmad, 1989, pp. 83-91).

In A-Z's views, astrology is an unlawful and harmful science, since it is impossible to escape from what God has predestined for us (Ibid, p.89). As to medicine, he finds it to be lawful, saying: "It is one of the sciences and it is permitted to study like other sciences" (Ibid, p.90). He also offers his opinion on diet, as follows: "One should not eat with people with big appetites unless one has a legitimate need for a lot of food, because it enables one to endure fasting, praying and hard work" (Ibid, p. 133).

Explaining his aim in writing this treatise on *learning* , A-Z says: "I have observed many learners of our time making a lot of effort to learn, but not achieving their goal, and debarred from the uses and benefits of learning, because they were missed the proper methods of learning and did not commit to its correct ways. I sought and desired to show them the right way to study" (Ahmad, 1989, p. 81).

His chapter on "Helpfulness and Good Advice" deals with both the teacher and the learner and its conclusion is good for both.

A-Z has suggestions for methods of learning which were quite uncommon in his time. The values he stresses are largely his own and reflect his pedagogical skill.

According to A-Z, the learner should write down the part he is learning, repeat it and learn it by heart, but after he has understood it clearly. He adds that learning should be done in an active and lively way and always be enjoyable and pleasant. For him, it is important to avoid boredom and rejection. And, as the religious man that he was, he claimed that the learner "should be industrious and call for God and pray to him and God will respond to his call" (Ibid, p. 137).

Finally, A-Z stresses the co-operation between the learner and his teacher and between the learner and his fellow students. Co-operation is, in his view, the most effective way to attain the goal of the study. It creates a supportive and democratic climate, mutual trust and habits of self-learning and autonomy as a process that contributes to the individual (The Open University, 1989, Unit 3, pp. 8-10).

The importance of A-Z's work lies in the fact that it is unique in his treatment of the subject of education for the period in which it was written. Writing on Islamic education was rare, and for many modern researchers, it is one of the most important books that have been written on that subject (al-Ahwani, 1955, p. 239). It is mainly an indication of the way the *Qur'an* and *Sunna* were interpreted at that time.

A-Z placed the teacher at the top of the social ladder and considered his job to be prestigious and highly respected. He also gave advice how to behave towards the teacher and explained that his orders are always to be obeyed, except if it would mean disobeying God (Ahmad, 1989, p. 108).

A-Z has been described as one of the original thinkers that Islam has produced and an original educational thinker. The question of the originality of his educational ideas is answered by the evidence indicating that his doctrine was indeed the original product of his spirit. No scholars or thinkers preceded him and

nobody influenced him in this subject. He was a successful educator, influent in his time and his place, and since his approaches and instruction have subsequently been known for generations, he was also a precursor of modern educational methods. His approach to collaborative instruction which emphasizes the learner's role at the center of the educational activity today occupies a central position in this field and is often debated by educators wishing to encourage the student to learn.

Von Grunebaum (1947, p. 1) mentioned in his study that A-Z was a Muslim who lived in the Middle East toward the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th centuries AD. Nothing is known of his life beyond what may be inferred from his writings, and of these the only one printed is the book we examined, *"Instructing (Teaching) the Learner: Methods of (Self) Learning"*. The popularity this book is proved by the fact that three commentaries were already written about it during the 16th century. It was first translated into a modern western language by Von Grunebaum, in 1947. It has since been a source of inspiration for several modern educators.

Education of Muslim Women

We cannot ignore that all these methods and teaching ways were intended for men only. The boy starts learning in his very early years, while the girl often remains illiterate. But didn't the Prophet say: "The quest for learning is a duty incumbent upon every Muslim, male and female"? In his book, A-Z briefly touches on this topic too, in only two places, the first of which is that the acquisition of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim, man or woman, and the second, the story of a female slave who had heard the teachings of Abu Yusuf and only remembered that he used to repeat frequently. On hearing this, Muhammad realized that knowledge could be attained from everyone (Ahmad, 1989, p.142). An interesting conclusion would be that slave girls were taught with the boys in

order to be sold at a higher price. It is however interesting to examine the general education of Muslim women in the medieval period and up to our days.

The Qur'an says categorically that men and women who are faithfully to God's commandments will be equally rewarded for their efforts. Many sacred verses confirm the equal spiritual status of men and women in Islam. But what about the intelligence, knowledge and the education of the women? "Knowledge" for a Muslim is not divided into sacred and secular. We must therefore assume that every boy or girl, man or woman, must be educated in the principles of Allah. The more a person, male or female, studies the creation and observes its working, the more that person becomes conscious of the Creator and His power.

This was recognized by A-Z who claims that learning and the acquisition of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim, man or woman. We shall try to find out how this principle has been applied in the medieval days. When the Muslim faith began to spread its teachings and its way of life, women were present in the mosque of the Prophet along with the men. But it soon became difficult for women to gain private audience with the Prophet and they complained to him. He then promised them to choose a day when he could meet with them regularly for instruction. On those days, the woman was never a parasite. She could collaborate with men in Muslim society to earn her life and develop her talents. We observe likewise that the position of the mother is exalted in Islamic tradition. The Prophet has gone so far as to say: "Even paradise lies underneath the feet of your mothers", and in regard of the woman's role as a wife, he told his audience: "The best among you is the one who is best toward his wife" (Muhammad, Hameedullah, 1979, par. 392, p. 134).

We are therefore to understand that the girl had to be instructed. But who was to be her teacher? A-Z answers: "It is obligatory for every Muslim, man or woman, to seek aspects of learning that are in keeping with his/her situation in life, for instance, the prayer" (Ahmad, 1989, p.83). The first teacher was usually the father.

Women's initial education was obtained in the family. Scholarship consisted of learning by rote such texts as *Hadith, fiqh and tafsir*. At later stages, the girls could have access to male scholars and teacher and even receive certificates attesting a certain level of knowledge and allowing them to teach up to that level.

Many Muslim women of that epoch are remembered by the width of their instruction. Let's only mention the name of Um Hani who knew *Hadith* and *fiqh* and was one of the distinguished scholars of her day (Ahmad, 1992, p.113). Another woman, Hajar, was educated by her father, visited scholars in his company and took part in the discussions in which he engaged with them. As-Sakhawi reports she was among the foremost *Hadith* scholars of her time and she also obtained certificates from male scholars (Ahmad, 1992, p. 113). Khadija bint 'Ali and Nashwa, both of the 15th century AD, and another woman whose name did not reach us were scholars and calligraphers and taught women as well as men. Bay Khatum, a scholar who taught the *Hadith* in the 14th century A.D, reports that his teachers had been distinguished male as well as female scholars. It is evident that, in those times, there was scholarly interaction between men and women, though we do not know where and how this took place. Historians of education in the Islamic world never mention the presence of women in the numerous schools or *madradas*. An interesting story about the Hanafi scholar al-Kasa'i, nicknamed "the King of the Scholars" reports that his wife, Fatima, the daughter of a well-known Muslim teacher, used to correct her husband if he made a mistake. Didn't she deserve to be called "the Queen of Scholars" as well? (Sarwar, 1996, p. 26)

But as time went on, the education of Muslim girls became more sporadic and superficial. There were people who believed that women's minds are incomplete, or that they might only use their literacy to write love letters. A-Z could not have foreseen that Islamic traditions would be corrupted over the centuries and that women were to be relegated to a position of ignorance and dependence. Great liberal Islamic reformers of the 19th century ad, such as Rifa'a Rafi' at-Tahtawi,

Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani and others viewed the status of women as a key item to the reform of society. At-Tahtawi wrote about the need for women's education and he also promoted the working of women, since idleness is a deplorable state. He recommended that girls be given the same education as boys. At this time, women felt free to engage in working life, mostly in sewing, embroidery and other forms of textile production (Tucker, 1986, p. 86). Egypt was the pioneer country in this field.

By the latter part of this period, especially in the end of the nineteenth and during the twentieth centuries, women could gain some income by teaching these skills. Some of them started learning to read at Arab schools. If the education of a girl was to be continued after the age of nine, female teachers were hired to give lessons at her home. Toward the end of this period, girls sometimes attended the *Kuttab*, the school attached to the mosque. But when instructed with the boys in the public school, the girls usually remained veiled and did not mingle with the boys.

Russell, an English physician who resided in Aleppo, notes that seven year old girls were frequently sent to school to learn to sew and embroider. After the age of nine, they could no more go out to schools, but continued their instruction with teachers at home. (Russell, 1794).

A small minority of women carried on their studies and even became renowned scholars and sometimes teachers. Those women mostly belonged to the educated class, that of the *'Ulama*, from which originated most jurists, theologians and administrators. They did not yet attend universities and colleges, but received their education from family members, mostly from fathers. Occasionally, a grandfather or an aunt taught the female child, and sometimes even a husband instructed his wife (Ahmad, 1992, pp.112-113). By the 1890s, the "Period of Enlightenment", a new institution appeared: the girls' school. These establishments taught not only to the primary level, but also beyond. And women began to be seen at the renowned and ancient religious and educational institutions of al-Azhar, in Cairo.

In the second half of the 20th century, Egyptian women started a new life of professional and educational fulfillment. While the state recognized their full rights to this development, the fundamentalist movement objected to this progress. The Muslim Brethren stated that education is essential to women in order that they might fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. However, the woman's natural place is her home. If she has time left after doing her duty in the home, she can use part of it in the service of society, provided that this is done within the legal limits of dignity and morality. A number of married women practice now as doctors or teach in Faculty. They have found harmony between their homes and jobs.

According to Mashhoor, the leader of the comprehensive guide of the Muslim Brethren, Islam gave women rights just as it gave to men, but their place is at home, nursing and educating their children. However, nothing prevents them from taking a prominent part in politics or administration. Women have the right to become judges and ministers, even prime ministers; the only function forbidden to them is that of "Caliph". Zaynab al-Ghazali, a Muslim woman who is one of the top leaders of the Brotherhood said, in 1983, that: "Education was a duty, and work was optional..." "there is nothing to stop women from having a public life". "Muslim women were fighters and nurses and social workers. They had held seminars and opened their homes for learning and schools"... "Women could also be preachers and could teach, judge, discuss and question" (Hoffman, 1985, pp. 233-254).

And Fatima Mernissi concludes: "Muslim women can walk into the modern world with pride, knowing that the quest for dignity and involvement in social affairs stems from Islamic values. It is a true part of the Muslim tradition (Mernissi, 1991, p. 8).

The Subjects of Education of Muslim Women and other Important Topics in the Book of Az-Zarnooji will be treated in future articles.

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