

Difficult Lessons

Mr. Kumayl was sitting with his son and talking to Seyyid. He had come after several days and it was near *maghrib* prayers. Few other students were also there. ‘Seyyid you know how busy life is. My son had appendix surgery few weeks ago and his exams are approaching. As you know, he is in 12th grade and must work hard so that he can enter a good university. Because of his surgery and the rest advised by the doctors, he has lagged behind a bit in his studies. Although he is very intelligent, I am still worried about Abbas’s future,’ he said. Seyyid smiled and looked towards Abbas and said: ‘No don’t worry. Abbas is very intelligent and smart and I am sure he will study hard and recover his loss in a short time and will do his best in exams.’ Mr. Kumayl was still worried and requested Seyyid to pray for him. It was now time for *maghrib* prayers and everyone began doing *wudhu*. Most of Seyyid’s students had arrived by then.

After *maghrib* prayers, Seyyid started his lecture. The topic was very interesting for the audience as Seyyid was talking on ‘self-admiration’ or *ujb*. He said that it is a dangerous disease and affects mostly those who are talented, such as top students, intellectuals and scholars, people with extraordinary skills and those who are in power and authority. ‘If a person uses ‘I’ very often in his conversation, feels that he is ‘something’, loves his opinions, thinks that he never makes a mistake, and has difficulty in accepting his mistakes, he is possibly suffering from this disease. He may offer different explanations to defend himself that he is normal but in fact he is sick as he only sees himself. He is more likely to make errors and makes more enemies because he is blinded to previous mistakes, blames others and makes more mistakes in the future and every time, he covers them with his high IQ and superficial knowledge.

An intelligent and realistic person is different. He has self-insight and sees himself with the eye of truth and attributes his successes and right opinions to the knowledge he has been bestowed by God and opportunities and helpers he has got. He takes his mistakes seriously, corrects them and doesn’t feel ashamed to accept them. He is thus a good team worker, while a person with *ujb* can never be a good team worker as his social cognition is very limited and he fails to appreciate others as he thinks that he is always right.’ Seyyid continued with his lecture and he then explained in detail the treatment and preventive strategies of this deadly disease. His lecture inspired everyone and awakened many of them, especially the university students who were particularly impressed and affected by his words. After

lecture, most of them were quiet and pondering over themselves. After dinner, people left slowly, saying goodbye to each other.

Abbas woke up at *fajr*. He had slept late in night as he was studying. After prayers, he was checking his emails and found an interesting email title:

'Get top position in your high school exams – Try our unique email based teaching program.'

He was curious and so opened the mail and found a deal for email-based learning program that was free for a week. It was from an online teacher who claimed to prepare students for grade 12 exams and guaranteed that if they follow the guidelines, they will score 80% or higher in their exams. However, the condition was that they should write their problems on daily basis and the teacher would reply next day with solutions and explanations. The teacher would take a test and ask questions randomly from the books. Abbas found it interesting and thought that since it is free for a week, he will benefit freely and then leave it. He then wrote two questions that were difficult for him each from physics, mathematics, chemistry and biology. Since he also had problems with certain basic concepts, he asked solutions to them also and sent the mail.

Abbas was curious as to when the reply will come and so after every few hours he was checking his email. He was on a study leave from his school and so he was usually in a public library near his house for his studies. After *maghrib* prayers, he went home and resumed studying. He slept at 11 in the night after checking mail and found that no answer had come from that online teacher. Next morning after *fajr*, when he checked his email, he was shocked with happiness. That online teacher had provided very clear answers to all his questions with figures from not only his grade 12 curriculum but also other books and had also attached few valuable tips for understanding the concepts he had difficulty in and had asked him. At the end of email, it said:

Ask me more – Your online teacher.

After Abbas downloaded and copied the answers to his computer, he thought for a while that the person must have spent at least 3 hours to write the answers for him. He then thought the fees he will charge after one week will be very expensive and so he immediately wrote email, thanking the online teacher for his nice and elaborate replies and giving his valuable time. He then asked 10 more questions and problems that were very difficult for him while going through the books yesterday and sent them. He thought that within next six days, he will try to 'use' this online teacher free of charge and solve all his major problems and leave him. Next day again after *fajr* prayers he checked his email and found that, as before, the replies sent by the teacher were very easy to understand. The answers were with extra figures and tables from other books and suggestions to write the answers to get maximum scores in exams. As usual the email ended with:

'Ask me more, dear student – Your online teacher.'

Within an hour Abbas first thanked the online teacher for his time and effort and again sent his new questions and problems he found yesterday. Abbas told his mother of this new online teacher scheme and said: 'Mother, I will get all my questions answered by this great online free teacher and then I will say thanks before leaving him at the end of one week.' His mother said that he should not do that. At least he should pay him some amount even though he hasn't asked for the 7 days free help he has provided to him. 'I will give you the money. You know that someone who teaches you actually makes you his subordinate. Imparting knowledge has no cost or returns. It's a highly valuable deed. At least you should show some respect to that teacher. You don't know why that person is spending valuable time to send you the answers. Perhaps that person has a sick member in his family and is hoping that you will pay money. And if tomorrow you get a good position in your exam, you will always feel guilty that you didn't pay the person,' she said. Abbas thanked his mother and agreed.

Days passed. Everyday Abbas was reading his books and updating his knowledge and understanding based on the replies provided by the online teacher. Interestingly, this online teacher was creative in his approach and so Abbas learned several new ways to understand and reply the questions and solve the problems. On 7th day, when Abbas opened his mail, he got the answers as usual. Still about 30% work was remaining and so he estimated that if online teacher helped him, it will take about two more weeks. His exams were after three weeks. He decided to write in detail to the online teacher:

Dear online teacher,

Salaam

God bless you. Many many thanks for your valuable time and guidance you have offered free of charge for the last seven days. Your answers and explanations and novel approaches have changed my basic understanding of all the subjects I have been studying since the last two years. I guess that you are a highly qualified knowledgeable person, perhaps a university professor.

I have utmost respect for you. May I ask you who you are and so I want to meet you personally and learn from you. Please send me your phone and address.

I want to pay you for the 7 days valuable teaching you provided to me. This is my mother's order to me and I must pay though you have offered it free. Kindly send your bank account number and the amount I have to pay. In addition, I wish to learn from you for two more weeks as my exams will start after three weeks and I wish to cover the whole curriculum with your new approach. Kindly, also let me know the amount for that too and I will pay in advance.

Many thanks and sincere prayers.

Respectfully,

Abbas

He then sent his questions in a separate email.

Within three hours Abbas got a reply from the online teacher. It read:

*Dear Abbas,
Salaam*

Thanks for your email. May God bless you with more knowledge. I also wish to meet you; however, I have a busy schedule. I will inform you about the payments after two weeks when you finish your studies with me. I will also try to meet you then. Please pay attention to your studies. Please say my Salams to your respected mother and ask her to pray for me.

*Thanks and du'a,
Online teacher*

Abbas was shocked to read the email. He was impressed by the trust that online teacher had put in him and his concern for him. He felt like this person is someone who knows him. It sounded like a bit unprofessional. However, due to pressure of exams, he dismissed the idea and started reading his course books again. At dinner, he told his family members about this online teacher's new email. Everyone was surprised. His father said that perhaps he is a student like you and so he asked your mother to pray for him. 'I am sure he is a young intelligent university student who is making his living by teaching online via email,' said Mr. Kumayl. 'Otherwise, these professional teaching centers charge a lot of money in advance and their quality is not good,' he continued. 'May God bless him with success in all his life endeavors,' Abbas's mother prayed for him. 'We will pay him whatever he asks,' Mr. Kumayl said. 'Abbas dear, you should take a break tomorrow and go to Seyyid's lecture at *maghrib*,' his mother suggested. Abbas agreed.

Next day, Abbas went to Seyyid's house before *maghrib*. Seyyid welcomed him and asked him about his studies and exams. Abbas told him about the online teacher and his great help. 'Seyyid, this teacher is exceptional. He has not charged me anything and he really cares for me. He compassionately wishes success for me and his style of answering questions and solving problems is really impressive. He gives me more than I ask him – every time,' Abbas said. Seyyid smiled and prayed for both of them. 'You are the seeker of knowledge and he is your teacher,' he said. 'But Seyyid, I feel like he knows me. He cares for me more than a professional online teacher does,' Abbas said and then looked at Seyyid's face for his response. Seyyid smiled and said: 'Maybe. But you should pay attention to your studies now and then pay him well after your learning is over with him. You should pray for him too.' Abbas agreed and thanked Seyyid.

After *maghrib* prayers, Seyyid gave an inspiring lecture on sincerity or *ikhlas*. He first recited *ayahs* of Qur'an and then mentioned few traditions on sincerity. Then he described the definition of a sincere action and the value of such an action in one's life and its impact in this world and the hereafter. He then explained in detail a hadith from Imam al-Sadiq (as): 'To persevere an action until it becomes sincere is more difficult than performing the action itself, and the sincerity of action lies in this that you should not

desire anyone to praise you for it except God Almighty, and intention supersedes action. Lo, verily, intention is action itself...’

Seyyid then said that all our actions, including studying at university, professional work to earn living for family, meeting with friends and relatives and helping them, loving one’s children, and all other actions, if they are done only with sincere intention to please God or as a duty towards Him, then they become accepted for divine reward. Most of the times these actions are rewarded in this world because they were done for minor returns and ‘socialization’ and directly or indirectly to please creatures.

Seyyid’s lecture was an eye opener for many of those sitting there and he ended his lecture with the following sentence: ‘One should remind himself of his duties and judge his intention and actions in the light of the verse of the Holy Qur’an:

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Say: "Truly my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. (6:162).

After the lecture, dinner was served and Abbas talked with a few of Seyyid’s students. Most of them asked him about his studies and exams. He then left for home.

Days passed quickly and on the last day of the two weeks when his online teaching was over, Abbas requested the online teacher to send his bank account details and his name and address so that he can meet him. However, he didn’t receive any reply. Abbas informed his mother and she said that is the online teacher may be sick. ‘You should pray for him and pay attention to your own studies. Right now this is the most important thing for you,’ she said. Abbas was very busy and stressed as exams were approaching. He didn’t go out of his house and only studied. During his exams, he used all the creative approaches taught by the online teacher to answer the questions and solve the problems. He always remembered the unknown teacher and prayed for him. Finally, his exams finished after two weeks and then, the first thing he did was to write again to that online teacher to send his name and address. He wrote:

Dear respected teacher,

Salam

God bless you. By the grace of God my exams went very well. I answered the questions according to the techniques and approaches taught by you. You have opened my mind to learn any new subject with different approaches. The three weeks of your teaching will have impact on my career in future. Thank you again.

Kindly send me your name, address, phone number so that I can meet you. Also send me your bank

account number so that my father will send you the amount he has in his mind because he thinks that your impressive teaching deserves much more amount than what you perhaps have in your mind.

God bless you and eagerly waiting to meet you.

Respectfully yours,

Abbas

After sending the email, Abbas was sure that his unknown teacher will reply. However, no reply came. He went to Seyyid and informed him about it. Seyyid smiled as usual and said to him that the online teacher is a very intelligent person and he will never want that you see him and give him money. 'He is a pious person who has done this good act for the sake of God,' said Seyyid. 'But Seyyid, he should realize that I can learn more from him if I meet him. By keeping himself unknown, he is indirectly denying me from learning from him,' said Abbas. Seyyid said that perhaps there are other reasons that he doesn't know. 'You should have good opinion of such a great man,' Seyyid said. Abbas realized his mistake and apologized to Seyyid. Then Seyyid said: 'You should give *sadaqa* for him and pray for him. Perhaps one day he will meet you if he thinks it is necessary.' Abbas agreed.

After three weeks, Abbas's result was announced. His name was among the top three students of the city and this meant that he was eligible for a government-funded scholarship to study abroad in any field he was interested in. He thanked his mother and father; they prayed for him and started informing relatives. Abbas's father called Seyyid and thanked him for his prayers and said that on Saturday he wishes to give dinner to all those who will come to his lecture. Abbas first went to Seyyid with sweets and kissed his hands. He remembered the unknown teacher and prayed for him. He told Seyyid, 'I wish he was here and I could meet him and learn more from him,' he said. Seyyid smiled and exhorted him to be patient and asked him to come on Saturday and inform his friends also. He said that he will announce that his father is giving special dinner for his success. 'This is to thank God for your great success in exam. If you go abroad on scholarship, you have to come back Abbas,' he said. Abbas thanked him and left for home.

After lunch, he wrote an email to the unknown teacher and informed him of his success. He then wrote:

Dear and respected teacher,

Kindly allow me to meet you and learn from you. I feel that by not meeting me you are denying imparting me knowledge and preventing me from learning more.

Please respond to this email as soon as possible.

Yours respectfully

Abbas

Next day, after *maghrib* he got a reply. That unknown teacher explained his denial of meeting with him

as:

*Dear Abbas,
Salaam*

I am very happy that you secured top position in your exams. I thank God for this opportunity. I know that you are eagerly wishing to meet me. However, I don't want to show myself to you because I have done this teaching as my duty and so I don't want any thanks or rewards for it.

However, because you have insisted so much, I will come to Seyyid's house on Saturday. But I will not introduce myself to you. You will see me but you will not know me as your teacher. Just bring sweets for everyone.

*Du'a,
Your unknown teacher*

Abbas was stunned to read the email. He took a print and then went to his mother and showed her. He also told his father. They were all excited and impressed by this great person. 'I am sure he is a student of mathematics or computers or similar subject at university,' said his father. 'But father there are so many who are from universities who come to Seyyid's house,' replied Abbas. 'We will not know who this person is,' said his mother. '*Insha'Allah* we will know him,' said his father, Mr. Kumayl.

'Brother Asad, sweets are not enough, you should take us to dinner at a restaurant. Your assignment was a great success and so it deserves more,' said Asad's younger sister. 'Okay I will,' replied Asad. His mother entered the room and found all her kids enjoying sweets. 'What is going on here?' she asked. 'Mother, remember few weeks ago I had an important assignment for my career promotion. Today the result was announced; I got third position in university. *Alhamdulillah*, now I can easily pass my other exams and write a great PhD thesis proposal,' replied Asad.

His mother recalled few weeks ago Asad was sick but he was working almost 18 hours a day for three weeks to prepare for his assignment and she was worried about his health. '*Alhamdulillah*, great achievement my son; you have done nice job. God bless you with more successes in future,' his mother prayed for him. 'So now brother, where is our dinner?' They all were demanding from Asad, who was the eldest son. Finally, Asad agreed to take them to dinner that night.

Next day, Abbas went to Seyyid and showed him the printed email. Seyyid smiled and said: 'Thank God. This person comes here and I am sure he is very smart to hide himself. I am sure we will never find him.' Abbas said that he will try to find him out. Seyyid just smiled.

On Saturday, Abbas came with his family much earlier to see everyone who comes and to find out his unknown teacher. His father was also with him in their search. But they couldn't find anyone's behavior 'abnormal'. Soon *maghrib* prayers started and after prayers, Seyyid gave a lecture on thanking God or *shukr*. He explained various characteristics of *shukr* and those who practice it. 'Thanking God doesn't mean that one should do *shukr* by tongue. It essentially means that one must realize by heart that all the blessings a person has are from God. One of the other prerequisites of thanking God is thanking the person who has done good, as without thanking the creature who deserves to be thanked, thanking God doesn't mean anything,' he continued.

At the end, Seyyid introduced Abbas and talked about his brilliant success in exams and prayed for him. He said that the dinner and sweets tonight are from Mr. Kumayl. Then he also praised the unknown teacher who had helped Abbas to secure this great success. He thanked that teacher and said: 'God will reward you. As you have said, you are here but no one will recognize you, I believe in you that you did this great deed of imparting knowledge for the sake of God's pleasure and so you wish to hide yourself to avoid *riya*' and any reward. I thank you and so does Mr. Kumayl's family. Please recite *salawat* for the teacher.'

While Seyyid was talking, Abbas was looking at a few faces that he thought were studying mathematics, computer sciences or similar subjects at universities, to detect if any one of them smiled or showed strong expression, since that person would be his teacher. But he couldn't detect anything. They were all the same. His father too was looking around at faces of young people in the gathering, but he too couldn't detect anything.

While dinner was being served from Abbas's family, everyone was helping out which was a routine at Seyyid's house. At the end of dinner, Abbas personally took the sweets and offered to every one himself. He did this to see the guests from near and if someone showed an emotional expression or talked 'extra', that person would be his teacher. However, he failed again as everyone thanked him. Many people gave him gifts and prayed for him. Finally, everyone left one by one and in the end, Mr. Kumayl's family was left with Seyyid. They all thanked Seyyid and his efforts. Mr. Kumayl said: 'Respected Seyyid. This was your great ethical training to do pure action sincerely for the sake of God and so this pious teacher has remained unknown as he only wished his reward from Him.' Seyyid just smiled and prayed for all of them and especially for Abbas. 'Abbas you have to be like this unknown teacher in the future,' he said. Abbas quickly replied: 'Sure I will be, *Insha'Allah*.'

In the afternoon of the next day, Seyyid saw an envelope pasted at his gate. Seyyid opened it and found a typed note in it:

Esteemed Seyyid,

Salam

Thanks for teaching us to do 'birr'. Job done only with toufiq of God. Please pray so that I keep it with

me until I die.

Your humble student.

Seyyid smiled and pondered deeply for a few minutes...he thanked God and prayed for the person.

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