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Education: The Basics

The four principles of education are:

Principle 1: The Fundamentals of Education

Here we are concerned with the basic principles and goals of education which we can divide into two groups:

- 1- Fixed fundamentals
- 2- Changing fundamentals

The fixed fundamentals include the principles and rules which do not change because man's basic needs and talents always exist.

The changing fundamentals, however, refer to the principles that vary with the subject material and circumstances.

Our study of the fundamentals of education will involve two parts:

- 1– Absolute and relative goals that include the extent and limits of education.
- 2– The principles that provide the essential basis of education.

The Goals and Duties of Education

The goals of education are:

- 1- Moderating man's raw feelings, animal instincts and correcting wrong ideas that may govern his mind.
- 2- Inducing and making acceptable the highest of human ideals, realities and values for the human being educated. It is obvious that this goal cannot become a reality unless the former goal is achieved, for without raw feelings having been moderated and the necessary mental corrections made, man will

never accept the highest of human ideals.

- 3– Interpreting for man what power is and how it is to be put to use. This is not possible unless man learns to wish for others also what he considers desirable for himself.
- 4– Creating a friendly relationship between man and himself: in many societies today, the internal cries of consciences are ignored and thoughts and ideas have fallen astray, distorting man's highest emotions, too the sole way out is to turn back and make up with ourselves again.

The Basics of Education

There are a series of intelligible principles concerning education, which if properly followed, can lead to knowledge that is longer–lasting and more profound. For instance, when one accepts the necessity of honesty due to correct upbringing– realizing that honesty strengthens his character– his knowledge of honesty will be much deeper and stronger. Some of the principles of education are:

- 1– The most important thing about education is realizing its necessity. Each human being must attempt to gain knowledge, and adapt himself to be able to do that. Being lazy or inconsiderate about education will destroy man's constructive talents and powers. Man must remember that education is the rule of man's life and how to live it. Education helps him make the distinction between right and wrong, good and bad. If man admits the crucial role education plays in creating a life based on righteousness, he will definitely go after it.
- 2- The human soul, like the universe, has rules and laws, ignoring which will cause disorders in man's soul.
- 3- Education must convey the supreme aim of life to man.
- 4– Education is a gradual process; individuals cannot be educated in a hurry.
- 5- Unconditional promises are not possible in education; teachers must keep in mind that they are dealing with delicate, sensitive mental rules, and the least slip may totally neutralize all educational efforts.
- 6- Education requires discipline and effort, on behalf of both the teacher and the student. Effort and discipline are both necessary, because education is a serious matter. The more crucial a fact is considered, the more serious it will become, and the more serious something is regarded, the more firmly one will try to gain all the knowledge about it.
- 7- Man's perfectionist ego must be considered in education. The perfectionist ego considers the highest of human values, ideals and goals; here, since man does not only see himself, he will not consider himself as the ideal of all things, either.

- 8- Education can make man aware of his inventive creative potentials. It can help his creative talents flourish. Unfortunately, despite the current advances in the humanities, the rules of activating talents remain unclear. Thus, the kind of education that can activate creativities and geniuses is still not available to man.
- The differences between the characters of various individuals should be taken into consideration in education. Although there are educational principles and fixed fundamentals that are applicable to all people, educating some certain individuals also calls for special strategies. In other words, it is necessary to consider each individual's character and qualities, and then devise the necessary methods of education.
- The trainee should also always try to reinforce his modes of reception. Man should consider himself in need of facts and truths to elevate and develop his character throughout his whole life. In youth, however, the ability to receive facts and truths should be strengthened. As Maxim Gorky says, "A good teacher should be a good student."
- Respect for character is quite a sensitive issue in education. The character of the trainee or student
 must be accurately evaluated so the appropriate behavior needed with regard to the trainee can be determined.

If the character of the trainee does not have the capacity to accept the advantage you wish to present him with, the value of the advantage will be tarnished in his view, and it may harm him too, so the extremely popular fact today – "Always respect the individual being educated" – calls for reconsideration. If the individual's character is in a way that respect would make him selfish, we will be actually betraying him, not giving him an advantage.

- 9- It is vitally essential that values are not to be sacrificed for achieving goals.
- 10- Human life is valuable, provided that it does not violate the principles of other human lives. The life of each human being "depends upon rays of divine light; serving other people is equal to worshipping God, and harming human lives is deviation from the right path."
- 11- There is a reaction to every action. "We must accept the fact that if we present an individual or the society with a bunch of flowers with purely good intentions, a bunch of flowers will definitely be given to us in return, directly or indirectly. If this fact is considered as a part of human education, man's mental revolution will begin, and we can claim to have stepped beyond natural history and entered human history."
- 12- Both the trainer and trainee should accept that no results will be achieved without hard work.
- 13- Only an original effort will prevail; subsidiary, unneeded ones will fade away. What remains is what is to people's benefit.

- 14- Both the educator and the educated must avoid being cruel or undergoing cruelty.
- 15- Not taking the principles of education seriously leads to nihilism.

Principle 2: The Teacher and the Trainer

God is man's first teacher and trainer. He has also sent His prophets to educate man. The fact that the word "rabb" (meaning lord, creator, nurturer and trainer) has been frequently mentioned in the Qur'an shows that God is man's teacher and trainer. On one hand, God has given man the potential to gain science and knowledge and reach perfection, and on the other hand He has sent prophets to educate and purify man.

We must keep in mind that man has three forms of teachers and trainers:

One: Some teachers merely take into account man's mechanical aspect, considering man as tools and devices needed by those in power. Such teachers dry out all feelings of freedom in their students or trainees, and inhibit their development.

Two: Some other teachers and trainers consider themselves as facing a group of people influenced by their own specific social circumstances; they do not care that man can be improved. Such teachers believe that their students are creatures with certain needs, which if fulfilled, the students can have a satisfactory life. Man's evolution is of no importance here. Alas, most teachers in today's societies believe in only this kind of education.

Three: Some teachers and trainers believe that their students have both mechanical aspects and spiritual aspects – the human soul. They try to activate man's hidden talents and potentials, which are like seeds planted inside the human nature. There are certain conditions to qualify as such a teacher:

- a) The teacher or trainer must have what he wants to teach. He must know what he is to teach the students/trainees, and how human character develops. The teacher must not act without knowledge.
- b) The teacher or trainer must be committed and devoted. He must realize that sooner or later, he will see his efforts produce results.

This world is like a mountain, and whatever we do is like shouting; they are reflected back to us.

Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi (Rumi)

a) The teacher or trainer must believe in the job. Education is impossible unless the teacher believes in the facts he is to present with eagerness, love and faith.

b) He should realize that his observable manners and actions are even more important than his words. His external behavior shows that, first of all, he believes in what he is doing. Secondly, the materialization of an action requires certain conditions that words do not have. It is when the teacher actually does things that it is revealed how he has conquered the barriers and left them behind. Thirdly, words are the means and actions are the end. By carrying out what he says, the teacher shows that actions are of crucial value.

Seeing the teacher or trainer actually do something and proceed with it, shows how much that action is to be done. The student realizes that his teacher would never spend his time and energy on that action without having knowledge about it.

c) The teacher should continue his endeavors to develop himself. Teachers and trainers must always consider themselves in need of education. "The best teacher is always the best student himself." As God as said to the Holy Prophet Muhammad:

"Say 'God, increase my knowledge." (20:114)

In our daily prayers, we ask God ten times a day to guide us to the right path, which reiterates how crucial this point is.

- d) Love and devotion toward the completion and development of the student or trainee: If the teacher has no other motive to teach besides making his living, or showing off, he will never be able to develop anyone. Many of the great figures of history have had teachers who were devoted and committed to their jobs.
- e) Asking God for help: The teacher or trainer should always depend on God, and ask Him for help. In education, we must ask God to help us succeed, for here, we are dealing with the development of the character of a human being. We want to change a heap of flesh, blood and bone into a Plato, a Socrates, a Jalal–addin Muhammad Molawi. Also, education is one of God's actions, so we must ask Him to allow us to deserve to be his representative in doing so.

By asking God for help, here we mean that people are very diverse – despite the great many points mankind has in common – thus, meeting the quota in education may mean having one teacher for each student. When we are facing a person who, though having many things in common with everyone else, has specific characteristics of his own that we may not even be able to totally discover throughout a long period of several years, we will have no other way for educating him but ask God to help us.

O people! What does the jar of our existence contain? Salty water, which is transferred inside us through our senses, filling up our inside and making us suppose this is the best existence possible in the universe. Dear God! Accept our physical jar, for You are the Kindest, and have promised us that You have bought the faithful's lives and possessions and given them heaven instead.

The jar of our physical existence includes five pipes – in fact, five senses. These five pipes are mainly employed by our animal–like instincts, and thus tends to keep in itself merely mortal pleasures that leave, on the long run, nothing but bitter results. Dear God! If You bless us and safeguard the water in our jar from contaminations, our jar can penetrate into the endless world of Your Love; then, our meager jar will be like a great sea.

Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi

f) In the realm of education, the teacher must not be discouraged by the student's stubbornness, or react with anger. The educator must not behave in a way that makes the person being taught resist his lessons, for if that happens, even the best of teachers cannot bring about the least mental development in the student.

Even the shocks the teacher gives the student must be administered in a way that leaves no negative impact on the student's soul. The gentle, logical mental 'taps' that we believe to be one of the greatest factors in human education, if administered crudely and thoughtlessly, can make the soul of the student react in defense if it doesn't disable it. Not only will the student fight back, he will also take an offensive position against the lesson.

Thus, the mental shocks and reminders should be given after childhood, when mental maturity has been achieved. Also, the student must realize that the main goal is his development and perfection, nothing else.

Principle 3: The Student and the Trainee

Man is quite a flexible being. All creatures in nature do not undergo much change during their lives – no mosquito changes into an eagle, and no lion becomes a whale – but man is capable of very dramatic change. Educators and teachers must realize that each child they face may be trained into an Abraham

or Moses, or even into a Genghis Khan, a Nero, a Yazid or a Machiavelli. Thus we must have in mind the principles of educating human beings:

- 1– The age of the student or trainee: Man has certain characteristics in various ages, each period calls for a different form of education. During childhood, for instance, man is intensely dependant upon his parents, and models his parents' behavior. Before mental maturity, man's character imitates others, but when man becomes able to dominate his internal existence, he will have an independent character. From youth to middle ages, physical development wanes and powers and talents are activated.
- 2- The importance of the material taught: The more important man considers the content, the more he will try to learn it. What man learns toward the end of childhood and at the beginning of his youth has a deep influence on him, because during these periods what is induced as education is regarded as the most important and desirable thing. In any part of man's life, if he considers a reality as crucial, he will be deeply influenced by it. This is why teachers and trainers should always make the crucial importance of the content they teach easily understandable and acceptable for students provided that, of course, the teachers and trainers have agreed upon it before.
- 3– The necessity of compatibility between the ideas of the teachers and trainers and those of the trainees and students: If there is harmony between teachers and parents during the childhood or adolescence of the students, education will prove more successful. Adversity between the school and the home can lead to harmful effects on the soul. There are three forms of harmony or disharmony between teachers and the students' parents:
- a) If there is complete harmony between parents and teachers, and the children are also eager to learn, education will lead to remarkable results, and create very prosperous people.
- b) If parents are indifferent toward their children's education, and only expect them to become educated members of the society, the students will not become as developed as the former group, but at least they will not suffer from internal conflict and contradiction.
- c) If parents disagree with the education their children are receiving, the children will suffer from mental and spiritual problems. Social leaders should do their best to present educational contents in a way that no mental or spiritual conflict is caused. Great men of wisdom, anthropologists and moralists have emphasized that the seeds of faith in God must be planted in the hearts of people so that they can reach perfection.
- 4– Taking care in how the students or trainees are transferred from the emotional period to the intellectual period: Man's mental maturation begins with progress from crude emotions to reasoning and intellect. This gradual process has certain forms of sensitivity. The children's mental activities during this period should be processed so that they do not feel empty and nihilistic. If those who are in the crude emotions period understand that human values are merely based upon emotions and not on reasoning, they will fall into great many problems, because they will think that any duty should make them ecstatic,

or that God will grant their every wish. There are two important points that must be kept in mind during the period of transition from emotions to reasoning and intellect:

- a) The teacher/trainer must educate his students/trainees of the importance and necessity of reasoning and its role in making man's contact with facts more logical without drying up the origins of life.
- b) Teachers should take great care when presenting the ways to make the transition from emotions to reasoning and intellect, for not all people can use the same methods in all conditions. For some people, explaining the errors that arise from absolute reliance on emotions and neglecting intellectual activities works more effectively. In some others, it is best to explain the advantages of reasoning with regard to facts. Other people prefer to have the reasoning methods of great figures explained to them. Still, some others are influenced by appropriate stories from which the results of reasoning are extracted.
- c) Explaining emotions and reasoning should not be overdone, or one of them may be sacrificed.
- 5- Creating great interest in asking questions: In education, we must do something that will make our students eager for discussion and reasoning instead of mere imitators; only then will we educate scholars in different fields and majors who are also creative.

Factors Resisting Education

There are several factors that make man resist constructive, useful education – in fact, a form of man fighting against himself.

- 1– Resistance due to hereditary factors: Some scientists believe that the most important factor that makes education fail is genetic factors. Such a theory should be criticized, for hereditary factors do not act as the ultimate causes; they do not determine man's definite fate. The reasons for this are:
- a) If hereditary factors did determine man's fate, there would be no change or development in human generations; however, no generation has been identical to its predecessors.
- b) The fact that children differ from their parents in appearance, behavior, and temper shows that hereditary factors are not the ultimate, conclusive factors in determining man's behavior, physique or mentality.
- c) If genetics were the sole operative factor, children would have to be studied based upon their parents' physical, mental and spiritual qualities.
- d) Environmental factors and favoritism among children also affect their education, so genetics cannot be the sole factor here. Considering the four reasons mentioned above, we must say that although some qualities and mental characteristics are transferred to children, they can be changed by means of educational and environmental factors, freedom and the child's hidden mental abilities; the hereditary factors are never the final, deciding ones.

If genetic factors were the determining factors in the human character, every legal trial would include a study of the mental qualities of the parents of the accused. No one has up to now claimed that an evil person must be the offspring of an evil parent, or vice versa.

- 2- The over-intensification of some mental qualities that inhibit education: If natural mental characteristics are over-intensified, the human soul will refuse to accept any more facts. For instance, if hedonism one of man's natural mental aspects is reinforced inadvertently, all aspects of the human soul will be affected by it, and other characteristics will fade away. This is why we must say that mental and spiritual well-being calls for all potentials and natural characteristics to develop equally and I balance ever since childhood.
- 3– Resistance against education due to lack of character: If man has no active, fixed character, he will refuse to consider any truth as necessary or proper. Such people resist educational matters, and their resistance increases as they age. Eventually, their resistance against education will prevent them from learning about the truth and higher evolutionary development, which will only lead to irrecoverable damage and loss.
- 4– Avoiding encouragement and rewarding, superficiality and ignoring the necessity of seeking the truth: Students should be made to go after the truth, not rewards. Teachers must educate their students to follow the truth and its crucial advantages instead of merely thinking about their own physical or material life. Students must realize that if life is not adjusted based upon original truths, artificial things such as money, power and fame will dominate their lives.

Principle 4: The Contents of Education

Many scholars have presented contents necessary for education. Frederic Maier has listed these fifteen items, which are quite approvable:

- 1- Intellectual thought
- 2- Appreciating culture
- 3- Developing creativity
- 4- The importance of understanding and using science
- 5- Contact with outstanding ideas
- 6- Spiritual and moral values
- 7- Basic skills
- 8- Career efficiency

- 9- Better compatibility to family life
- 10- Effective satisfaction
- 11- Physical and mental well-being
- 12- Change of personality in order to create more interest in knowledge and understanding the truth
- 13- Creating stable interests
- 14- Creating interest in keeping peace
- 15- Making understood that man is an ultimate criterion of the universe

Although the above–mentioned items are general and their desirability is uncertain, the important point is presenting the criteria, principles and motives of the contents education should include. Despite the fact that intellectual thinking and reinforcing it are important parts of education, the question is how they can be developed. Cultural appreciation is significant, but what criteria show that a culture is great enough to be used for education?

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