

The Best Students

From this point, we realize that there is another issue which we are able to understand which is that the best students of the philosophers are the same people who lived at their time and saw them – which is at variance with the best students of the Prophets and the intimate friends of Allah (the Awliya).

The best students of Plato, Aristotle or Abu ʿAli Sina were those who were directly in their study circle. The person who best understand the thoughts of Abu ʿAli were people such as Bahmanyar or Abu ʿAbid Jawzjani.

However, who were the best students of the Noble Prophet (S), Amirul Moʿminin ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) or Imam Jaʿfar ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (a.s.)? Are their best students only those people who lived at their time and who lived with them? No, this is not the case!

There is a point which the Noble Prophet (S) himself had alluded to in one of his speeches. It is possible that those people who lived at the Prophet's (S) time did not correctly understand the true meaning of these words (with the exception of people such as Salman (r.d.a.), Abu Dharr (r.d.a.) and Miqdad (r.d.a.), others may not have completely understood his words). The Prophet (S) had said:

نَصَرَ اللّٰهُ عَبْدًا سَمِعَ مَقَالَتِي فَوَعَاَهَا وَبَلَّغَهَا مَنْ لَمْ يَبْلُغْهُ

“May Allah assist that servant who hears my words, understands them and then conveys them to those who have not been informed of them.”¹

In other narrations, this hadith has been mentioned as:

نَصَرَ اللّٰهُ عَبْدًا سَمِعَ مَقَالَتِي...

“May Allah show kindness to that servant who hears my words...”

The Prophet (S) then said:

رُبَّ حَامِلٍ فِقْهٍ غَيْرِ فَقِيهِ وَرُبَّ حَامِلٍ فِقْهٍ إِلَى مَنْ هُوَ أَفْقَهُ مِنْهُ

“How possible it is that sometimes a person possesses a deep understanding of the religion whereas he himself is not a Faqih (one firmly grounded in the Islamic sciences) and how possible it is that sometimes one would transfer his knowledge to another person but that other person is actually more knowledgeable than the one transferring the knowledge.”²

The lexical meaning of the word Fiqh (فقه) in the religion of Islam actually refers to the reality and the true wisdom of the din (religion) which must be achieved through deep study and thought and thus, the meaning in this hadith is the truth and the words which people hear directly from the Imam (a.s.).

This hadith tells us that there are many people who hear these words and hear the truth of the religion directly from the Imam (a.s.) and memorize it, but they are not people of understanding and analysis. There are also many people who take the words and truths of the religion and pass them on to other people, but the people whom they pass this knowledge on to are much more worthy and are much better at understanding and comprehending this knowledge.

For example, a person heard the words of the Prophet (S) when he said:

لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضِرَارَ

“Do not do anything that causes harm to yourself or to others.”

However the person who heard these words did not have the ability to understand how deep or profound this sentence was. Nonetheless, he memorized it and then passed it on to the next generation, and the next generation understood it better than he did – and this generation too passed it on to the next generation. It is possible that this will continue on until the twentieth generation and they will understand it better than the first, second and third generation, as this twentieth generation will be better equipped to understand it.

The Qurʾān is the same. We cannot say that the people who were in the past understood the Qurʾān better (than others) – rather, it is the opposite of this. The miracle of the Qurʾān lies in the fact that the Qurʾān is always one step ahead of the commentaries which are written about it – meaning that in each and every time period in which the Qurʾān has been explained, when the knowledge and understanding

of the people increases, they will go forth to re-interpret and re-understand the Qurʾān and they will see that the Qurʾān has far surpassed their commentary and is much more advanced than what they had written.

We do not need to go far in this discussion – simply look at the Science of Jurisprudence (ʿIlmul Usul). Without doubt, the companions of the Noble Prophet (S), the companions of Amirul Moʿminin ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), the companions of Imam Jaʿfar ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (a.s.) and even companions such as Zurarah (r.d.a.) and Hisham ibn al-Hakam (r.d.a.) were people who had learnt the laws of Fiqh either directly from the Prophet (S) or from one of the Aʿimmah (a.s.), however they did not understand, analyze and examine the rules of jurisprudence as Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (q.d.s.), ʿAllamah al-Hilli (q.d.s.), Shaykh Murtaʿa (q.d.s.) and Shaykh Ansari (q.d.s.) did.

Therefore, as we mentioned – in the ways of the philosophers, which person is better at understanding the meanings of his teacher? It is that person who goes the furthest back (to his teacher). However in the school of the Prophets and the intimate friends of Allah (s.w.t.), who would be better apt to understanding the meanings and words of these noble personalities? It is those people who come in the future and possess more knowledge and understanding and this is one of the miracles of prophethood.

In a hadith which is found in the section on Tawhid, it is mentioned that since Allah (s.w.t.) knew that in the end of time, people would come forth who would go deep in thought and delve deep in deliberation on a subject, He revealed Suratul Ikhlas and the first few verses of Suratul Hadid which include the greatest and most precise issues in relation to Tawhid.

By this we mean that the people at the time of the Prophet (S) were not worthy of such verses. However in the future, such people would surely come who would be worthy of receiving these verses of the Qurʾān. These verses are what will provide spiritual nourishment to the people of the future time. Of course since these verses express the final utmost limits of elucidating on the concept of Tawhid, if a person was to rebel and go against these verses, he would definitely be destroyed. This is the miracle of prophethood and the miracle of the Qurʾān which is:

لَا تَنْقُضِي عَجَائِبُهُ وَلَا تَفْنِي غَرَائِبُهُ

“It’s (the Qurʾān) points of amazement never cease to end and its amazement will never pass away.”³¹⁶

All that we have stated up until this point was for this purpose that: when we wish to discuss the issue and speak about the guidance of the youth, we should not have someone stand up and say, “Sir! As if there is a difference between the guidance of the youth and the guidance of the older generation?! As if the Salat that the youth perform and the Salat that we the older people perform is different, such that

their guidance should also be something different? Just as how in the past we did things, so too we should continue in that same way today.

In the past, the way we interacted with our elders and our mothers and fathers and just as we sat together in the Majlis (gathering) and related incidents about the trials and tribulations that faced the Ahlul Bait E and the ways in which we recognized Allah (s.w.t.) and received guidance – the youth of today too must close their eyes (to the realities) and must go to those same places that we went to and learn and be guided just as we were taught and guided!”

1. Al-Amali of Shaykh al-Mufid, Sitting 23, Page 186

2. Furu` al-Kafi, Volume 5, Page 293

3. Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 150

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