Model-based Educational Method according to Imam Ali (AS) in Nahjul Balaghah

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Abstract

Tarbiyah (lit. upbringing), which is to pave the ground for the development of the God-gifted potentials of the one being raised to attain divine proximity, is an important religious discussion. There are different available methods for upbringing and nurture the most important and most effective of which is the model-based method. This method enjoys paramount importance and value in the words and normative conduct of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (AS). A model-based method is a method based on presenting a concrete and practical example. In this method, the educator endeavors to practically show the trainee the ideal pattern, conduct and behavior so that the circumstances conducive to learning and emulation may be made available. This method is very much superior to other methods since it is natural, objective, tangible and indirect as well as characterized by a direct observation, quick transfer of concepts and sustainability, not to mention that it also instills confidence in the trainee. What is understood from the words of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (AS) is that in his educational conduct, the model-based method has been used in three ways: model presentation, model description and model elimination. Imam Ali (AS) makes use of both direct and indirect methods to either present a model or eliminate it. The introduced role models are divided into infallible and fallible subcategories. The most important of infallible models are the divine prophets especially the Prophet of Islam, his household especially himself and the fallible religious patterns are Khabbab bin Aratt, Malik Ashtar Nakha’ei and Ammar. Imam Ali (AS) has also introduced negative and anti-religious icons the most well-known of them are Mu’awiyah, Cain and ‘Amr Aas.

Keywords: religious education, Imam Ali, model based educational method
1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of human creation is to reach divine perfection and happiness which are made possible only through proper upbringing and nurture. In Islamic education, there are different methods of enabling man to achieve perfection. Each method has its specific features and effects which, if applied by the educator, should be precisely known and identified. Meanwhile, the model based educational method, which has been affirmed by the Quran and prophetic traditions and has been the focus of attention in educational sciences, is one of the useful and efficient methods of educating and training people.

“A very delicate and precise feature qualifying this educational method is that the educator does not engage directly in training work. As a result, the greatest benefit of this method is that the trainee’s integrity and character remain untouched and unblemished because through this method, the educator does not have anything to do directly with the trainee. In fact, it is the trainee who brings himself close to the educator”. (Rashidpour, 2010)

The need for presenting an example or a role model is due to the fact that, firstly, the trainer practically observes a moral conduct with all its specifics. Thus, he comes to know not only the moral conduct itself but also the conditions necessary for its materialization and effectiveness on others as well as its status as compared to other behaviors. Secondly, observing the conduct of a role model makes it possible for the trainee to put it into practice. It is important for the simple reason that carrying out certain behavior initially seems to be impossible. Thirdly, observing the ethical behaviors of a model as well as their beauties motivates the trainee to take action towards practicing and solidifying them. (Dawari, Hussein Zadeh, 2010)

Imam Ali (AS) having the most comprehensive, perfect and flawless personality is undoubtedly the greatest human – divine mentor who is well aware of all the ways leading to heaven and who has, by using diverse methods, led trainees to happiness and perfection. A model based tarbiyah (education) is one of the methods which the Commander of the Faithful gave special attention to. We shall study his words to prove this claim.

Imam Ali (AS) says about the necessity of a model based education:

«وَ لَقَدْ كَانَ فَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ع) كَافٍ لَكَ فَ وَلَيْسَ أَسْوَةً لِمَنْ تَؤَسَهُ وَ عَزَاءً لِمَنْ تَعِزَّ...»

Certainly, in the Prophet of Allah (S) was sufficient example for you... (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

He further says in the same sermon:

«فَتَؤَسه بِنَبٌِِّكَ الَْْطٌَْبِ الَْْطْهَرِ فَإِنه فٌِهِ أُسْوَةً لِمَنْ تَؤَسهی وَ عَزَاءً لِمَنْ تَعَزهی...»

You should follow your Prophet, the pure, the chaste, may Allah bless him and his descendants. In him is the example for the follower, and the consolation for the seeker of consolation. (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

Obviously, Imam Ali (AS) clearly and forthrightly draws a conclusion through a valid syllogism that introduces the Holy Prophet of Islam as the most perfect example ordering us
to follow him as a role model. The Imam’s order is binding and necessary. Meanwhile, he points out that the lifestyle and normative conduct of the Prophet of Islam is an example for every trainee and anyone who is seeking an example to attain happiness and tread the path of perfection. (Ibn Maytham Bahrani, 1983).

The Imam then concludes from the premises as such:

وَ أَحْبَبْ الْعَبَّادِ إِلَى اللَّهِ الْمُتَأَسَّرَ بِنَبِيِّهِ وَ الْمُقْتَبِ بِأَرْحَمَهُ

*The most beloved person before Allah is he who follows His Prophet and who treads in his footsteps.* (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

Undoubtedly, with this saying of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (AS), the necessity and unique value of a model based education according to Imam Ali (AS) is clear and tangible. This article, therefore, seeks to study this method from the perspective of Imam Ali (AS) in Nahjul Balaghah.

It is noteworthy that no independent research in any form, book, article or thesis, was found on this subject. However, when it comes to Islamic education, methods of education, principles of education in Islam, model-making and following a model, a number of books and articles covering model-based education partially have been written including the following:


   In this book, the writer deals with various methods and modalities of education in Islam. The second method discussed by him is to have a role model and an example to be followed. Islam is emphatic about the necessity of following the behavior of those who serve as positive role models. This method is affirmed by Islam.


   In the fourth chapter of this book, the author explains one of the methods involving description of a role model. Defining role model he elaborates upon the conduct of the educator whereupon he makes reference to a number of Quranic verses in which examples of good and bad individuals have been identified.


   In this book, the writer discussing educational methods describes the model based method as the most important educational method. Different patterns and their role in education such as parents, teacher, inconsistency between words and practice, conflict between various models and their negative impacts, the instinct of imitation etc are the topics discussed in this book in a sequential order.

In the fifth section of this book, the writer discusses methods of education and upbringing touching, first, on the model based method. He says that it is in man’s nature to follow someone as a role model and this characteristic of following someone as a role model is the best and shortest educational method. He goes on to discuss the role of the models in education as well as their responsibility.

The method used in this article is descriptive – analytical relying on secondary data collection method.

2. Concepts

1.2. Method

Method, “a set of definite and easy rules adherence to which does not let an individual to consider an incorrect way to be correct as well as enable him to know the reality of what he seeks to know without unnecessary effort and by way of steady increase of knowledge.” (Rafi’ei, 2002).

Method is an established prescribed practice or systematic process of achieving educational ends. A method determines the practical duty of a mentor and helps the trainee to learn how to carry out a certain task”. (Ahmadi, 1985)

2.2 Tarbiyah (Education)

The Arabic word *tarbiyah* has been defined in a variety of ways with different scholars from different disciplines having their own special views and notions as will be mentioned here.

“According to some scholars, *tarbiyah* means to cause something to develop (from stage to stage) until reaching its full potential. They say that a human being in the early stage of his life possesses a number of potentials. If someone develops these potentials, he is considered to have done an act of *tarbiyah* or educational work”. (Rashidpour, 2010)

Some others say as such: “*Tarbiyah* refers to a regular and continuous activity in order to help physical, cognitive, moral, social and emotional growth and generally fostering and developing the trainee’s talents and potentials in such a way that its results exhibit themselves on the trainee’s character, especially his behavior”. (Haji Dehabadi, 1999)

Another definition is: “*Tarbiyah* means to pave the way for growth and development of a child’s inner, physical and intellectual potentials in order for him to attain ideal perfection and this is a conscious act aimed at raising, building, changing and nurturing his natural talents”. (Ismaili Yazdi, 2002)
On the whole, we can present an inclusive definition of *tarbiyah* and that is: “*Tarbiyah* means to pave ground and provide means for activation and development of a man’s potentials in order that he may attain ideal perfection”. (Abbasi Muqaddam, 1992)

3.2. Model

The word model literally means example, guide, paradigm, exemplar and instance. (Dehkhuda, 1973) However in technical terminology, model means a solid external but indirect rule and instruction which man consciously or subconsciously imitate or emulate.” (Qaemi, 1995)

As a result, a role model is one who could stand as an example for others to be guided in the path of perfection and real happiness; he is one who bears valuable virtues and traits of perfection and is eligible to serve as an exemplar. He is one who has ridden himself from wrong and superstitious habits, norms and practices and whose conducts a sound reason affirms”. (Karimiyan, 2001)

4.2. The educational methods

The educational methods involve various techniques and behaviors which the educator makes use of to attain his educational objectives. It is a way to organize and sequence the act of education as well as to help materialize its goal. It determines the practical duties of the educator and helps the trainee to learn how to conduct himself.

It can be said clearly that in order for a person to succeed, he must be fully cognizant of the means and tools which would help him to quickly and easily attain his end. The educational methods are among those very means and tools. (Shokuhi Yeckta, 1990)

Only those educators are able to distinguish and make use of proper methods of upbringing who are well aware of the general and specific traits of trainees as well as of the goals and principles which they should take into consideration. Encouraging, punishing, showing care and love and rebuking the trainee are among the educational methods, but the way these methods should be applied and how the mentor considers the trainee’s condition are so important that going to extremes in reprimanding the trainee will end up only in stubbornness, grudge and deviation. On the contrary, misplaced and excessive encouragement will have negative consequences. For example, although being strict and violent is necessary at times, educators cannot keep being strict and violent all the time because violence is an element which, if used frequently, will only serve to disperse followers. Therefore, every method should be used with a view to the traits and characteristics of the trainee and the environment in which the educational work is taking place. As well, all acceptable religious values should be taken into consideration and observed. (Haji Dehabadi, 1999)

In the books written on education and upbringing, different methods have been put forth such as showing love, neglecting, encouraging, punishing, reminding, enjoining good and forbidding evil and the model based method.
5.2. Model based method

The model based method is a method involving an exemplar and practical presentation of an instance. In this method, the educator endeavors to present to the trainee the ideal behavior and conduct so that the circumstances necessary for emulation and imitation is made available.” (Qaemi Muqaddam, 2003)

As a result, this method is very quick and effective in the educational process because it is objective, applicable, tangible, imitable and which the trainee shall accept with all his heart. (A’arafi and a group of writers, 2007)

Muhammad Qutb also says in this regard: “Islam has based its educational method more on a model based method than on any other measures because the most feasible and successful means of education is to train and educate with the help of a tangible and living exemplar.” (Qutb, 1996)

3. Distinction of model based education over other methods

The model based method is among the most efficient educational methods characterized by special and excellent features such as the following:

1.3. Being natural

The instinct of emulation is one of the strongest, highly deep-rooted, and most useful human instincts ingrained in the human nature and which does not require any instruction.” (Amini, 2009)

The influence of an example or a role model on an individual is something natural emanating from the instinct of imitation and which is used in a model based method of education.

2.3. Being objective and tangible

In this method, an objective and imitable example is revealed to the trainee. If appealing to the trainee, he will endeavor to assimilate and follow the example. In view of this method being objective and tangible and also because of man’s intrinsic inclination to assimilate a role model, this method is highly effective and fast in the educational process. The more perfect and attractive the presented example in terms of lofty traits, the more efficient the method would be”. (Delshad Tehrani, 2008)

3.3. Learning through direct observation

Considering the human aspect of models, one of the merits and distinctions of this method is its being observable. The examples are always visible to others and are living in equal conditions with others but they possess valuable traits. (Abbasi Muqaddam, 1992)

In this method, the trainee learns through direct observation and it is for this reason that it can be one of the most effective and sustainable modality of learning.” (Qaemi Muqaddam, 2003)
4.3. Quick learning

Another feature of this method is quick learning and transfer of concepts. If a book or a piece of writing is used to educate a trainee, it will take much more time than when he is exposed to an ideal moral conduct.

5.3. Sustainability

Among the exclusive features of a model based education is that it is sustainable and lasting in the sense that man, due to his instinctive desire to emulate others, always tends to look at and follow a role model. Therefore, this method is not restricted to a special time or circumstance.

Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah. (Quran, 33: 21)

Commenting on this verse, Late Allamah Tabatabai says in his Al-Mizan: “The word ‘uswah’ means to follow and ‘in the Messenger of Allah’ means that he is the one who should be followed. The sentence ‘Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah’ indicates continuity in the past which implies that you should always follow him and be subservient to him.

6.3. Being easy

Then Allah sent a crow digging up the earth so that he might show him how he should cover the dead body of his brother. He said: Woe me! do I lack the strength that I should be like this crow and cover the dead body of my brother? So he became of those who regret. (Quran, 5:31)

The context shows that the killer had spent a considerable time in bewilderment and perplexity; while he was wary lest others come to know of his deed; he could not understand what device to use in order to hide the dead body of his brother; this continued until Allah sent the crow. If the sending of the crow and his digging the earth had occurred close together with his slaying of his brother, he would not have lamented in these words: "Woe me! Do I lack the strength that I should be like this crow and cover the dead body of my brother?"

Also it appears from the context that the crow had buried something in the earth after digging it; clearly it wanted to demonstrate the method of burial, not the way of digging. Mere digging could not teach him how to bury the dead body, because he was so simple minded that he did not understand the purpose of digging; how could he go ahead from digging to burial as the two things are not concomitant. His mind perceived the method of burial when he saw the crow digging the earth and burying something in it.
What is clearly understood from Allamah Tabatabai’s exegetic explanation is that Cain was perplexed and kept wondering what to do due to him being simple-minded. Then, God, the Exalted, made use of an easy and learnable method (i.e. the model based method) to teach him the burial method. (Musavi Hamedani, 1995)

7.3. Instilling confidence

The trainee seeing the example comes to realize his own talents and capabilities which he shall try to develop. Seeing the example raises confidence in the trainee and reassures him in his effort to achieve perfection. (Rashidpour, 2011)

8.3. Indirect instruction

In this method, the trainee observes the perfect behavior completely. However, since the method is indirect, the method does not give rise to any negative sensitivity because no explicit or direct demand is made to the trainee. Hence, it can have a greater impact on him.

4. Model based education according to Imam Ali (AS)

The model based education in Imam Ali’s words can be sorted out into the following categories which would help us better understand the importance of this method according to him.

1.4. Presenting a model in Imam Ali’s lifestyle

In Imam Ali’s educational lifestyle, there are lots of positive, real and observable examples which have taken place in the external world. He has time and again made direct references to prophets especially the Prophet of Islam, the household of the Prophet (AS), the pious ones and believers as the ideal examples to be followed by the trainee. (Qaemi Muqaddam, 2003). This method of education which is based on introducing a model is observable in both direct and indirect manner in Imam Ali’s lifestyle. The first method prescribes assimilating and following good examples such as the Holy Prophet. The second method involves describing the position and status of the role model encouraging the trainee to adopt and follow his virtues and noble characteristics. For instance the example of Khabbab bin Aratt is mentioned in an indirect way as will be further discussed later.

What is noteworthy is that in many cases, Imam Ali (AS) identifies himself as a role model and leader to be followed by others. He enumerates his own exclusive noble traits so that others may follow him or that they may be encouraged to adopt his lifestyle. A considerable part of his words in Nahjul Balaghah are allotted to mentioning his own merits, virtues and distinctions.

1.1.4. Direct method

As such, in his normative conduct, the Imam identifies himself and others as a role model. He introduces directly the Holy Prophet (S) as an example ordering others to following him. He follows the same approach about himself.
In letter 45 of *Nahjul Balaghah*, the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (AS) says as such:

«َأَلََّ إِىَّ لِكُلِّ هَأْهُْمٍ إِهَاهاً يَقْتَدِي بَِِ َّ يَسْتَضِيءُ بِعِلْوَِِ أَلََّ إِىَّ إِهَاهَكُنْ قَدِ اكْتَفَی هِيْ دًُْيَاٍُِْ بِطِوْرَيَِْ َّ هِيْ طُعْوَِِ بِقُرْ َيَِْ أَلََّ إًَِّكُنْ لََ َقْدِرُّىَ عَلَی َلَكِيْ أَعِيًٌُِْي بَِْرٍَ ااْتَِِادٍ َّ عِفَّ ٍ َّ دَادٍ».»

“Remember that every follower has a leader whom he follows and from the effulgence of whose knowledge he takes light. Realize that your Imam has contented himself with two shabby pieces of cloth out of the (comforts of the) world and two loaves for his meal. Certainly, you cannot do so but at least support me in piety, exertion, chastity and uprightness.” (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

There are points to note in connection with this saying of the Commander of the Faithful:

Firstly, according to Imam Ali (AS) every follower should have a leader who is his role model and the source of his emulation. Secondly, he identifies himself as the leader and example enumerating his traits and characteristics. Thirdly, he admits that his example is inaccessible and difficult to adopt but everyone should make efforts to bring himself close to him by following the direction he himself enjoins.

Mentioning a role model who is very supreme and lofty causes others to easily and unconsciously accept and follow the model.

In one of his valuable short sayings, Ali (AS) says:

أَنَا ٌَعْسُوبُ الْمُإْمِنٌِنَ وَالْمَالُ ٌَعْسُوبُ الْفُ هار

*I am the leader of the believers and wealth is the leader of the debauched.* (Sayyid Razi, 1983).

That is to say, the faithful ones follow me and the evil doers seek wealth in the same way as bees follow their leader. Obviously, what is certain is that Ali (AS) identifies himself as an educator, role model and one who should be followed by others.

He introduces the divine prophets as the divine authorities who are role models in all their deeds and sayings and who should, because of the same reason, be followed by others.

Heh بهت الله رَسَلًا بِما خَصْصُونَهُ بِمَن وَحْيَهُ وَ جَعَلُهُمْ حَجَّةً لَهُ عَلَى خَفِيفٍ»

Allah deputed prophets and distinguished them with His revelation. He made them as pleas for Him among His creation. (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

Hence the prophets are examples and role models due to whose presence people are left with no excuse. The point that has to be noted is that the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (AS) has said that every follower should follow the Holy Prophet (S) and the same is true with other prophets. He has referred to them as exemplars and the particular reason the Holy Prophet’s name has been mentioned is that he bears all the traits of the previous prophets and one who follows him has in fact followed all the previous prophets. (Ibn Maytham Bahrani, 1983)
The role models thus far mentioned and talked about are infallible and inerrant but there are also fallible people introduced as role models in the Imam’s model-based educational conduct. To name a few of them, they are personalities like Malik Ashtar, Salman Farsi, Khabbab bin Arat etc.

Imam Ali (AS) says in one of his sermons:

«كَانَ لِي فِي مَآ مَضَى أَخَةٌ فَٰنَّ اللَّهِ وَ كَانَ ٌُعْظِمُهُ فَٰنَّ عٌَْنًِ ِغَرُ الدبُّنٌَْا فَٰنَّ عٌَْنِهِ وَ كَانَ ٌَّرِ اً مِنْ سُلْطَانِ بَطْنِهِ فَلََشْتَهًِ مَا لََ ٌَ ِدُ وَ لََ ٌُكْ ِرُ  ِ َا وَ َدَ وَ كَانَ أَكْ َرَ دَهْرِ ِ َامِتاً فَإِنْ قَالَ بَ ه الْقَائِلٌِنَ وَ نَقَعَ غَلٌِلَ السهائِلٍِنَ وَ كَانَ ضَعٌِفاً مُسْتَضْعَفاً فَإِنْ  َاءَ الْ ِدبُّ فَهُوَ لٌَْثُ غَابٍ وَ  ِلبُّ وَادٍ لََ ٌُدْلًِ بِ ُ ه ٍ  َتهی ٌَؤْتًَِ قَاضٌِاً وَ كَانَ لََ ٌَلُو ُ أَ َداً عَلَی مَا ٌَ ِدُ الْعُ ْرَ  فًِ مِ ْلِهِ  َتهی ٌَسْمَعَ اعْتِ َارَ ُ وَ كَانَ لََ ٌَشْكُو وَ َعاً  ِلَه عِنْدَ بُرْئِهِ وَ كَانَ ٌَقُولُ مَا ٌَفْعَلُ وَ لََ ٌَقُولُ مَا لٌَََفْعَلُ كَانَ  ِ َا غُلِبَ عَلٌَ الْکَ ٌِرِ</p>
Allah, surely they have met Allah and He has bestowed upon them their rewards and He has lodged them in safe houses after their (having suffered) fear. Where are my brethren who took the (right) path and trod in righteousness. Where is ‘Ammar? Where is Ibn at-Tayyihan? Where is Dhu’sh-Shahadatayn? And where are others like them from among their comrades who had pledged themselves to death and whose (severed) heads were taken to the wicked enemy. Oh my brothers who recited the Qur’an and strengthened it, thought over their obligation and fulfilled it, revived the sunnah and destroyed innovation! When they were called to jihad they responded and trusted in their leader then followed him. (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

Imam Ali (AS) describes them as his brothers, reciters of the Quran, those who adhered to it and thought over it, revived divine traditions and stood against innovations, they are the divine and religious examples who should be followed according to the Imam.

2.1.4. Indirect method

In this method, the Imam introduces ideal role models by making mention of their special qualities and noble traits. He does not order us directly to follow them but by making reference to their particular features, he motivates the trainee to follow a role model. He simply persuades and encourages him without giving any order.

When it comes to Khabbab bin Aratt, he says:

May Allah have mercy on Khabbab ibn al-Aratt since he accepted Islam willingly, immigrated (from Mecca) obediently, remained content with what sufficed him, was pleased with Allah and lived the life of a mujahid (holy soldier). (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

Khabbab is thus introduced as an exemplar who God is pleased with and has noble traits which are necessary for others to acquire. In this instance, Ali (AS) has indirectly introduced an example. That is, no direct and explicit order has been issue to follow Khabbab but he has called on the trainee by saying that God is pleased with him and that, in a religious nurture God’s satisfaction and pleasure is a sign of the highest degree of perfection.

4.2. Model making in Imam Ali’s lifestyle

In this type of model based education in Imam Ali’s way of life and conduct, the Imam deals with the characteristics and features of a role model paving ground for visualizing a pattern through its signs and characteristics.

As was said earlier, the more skillful and adept the trainer is in describing the ideal model, the more the trainee will be able to adapt himself and follow the model. (Qaemi Muqaddam, 2003)

This type of model based education has a lot of merits as he embarks on enumerating the characteristics of the pious and God-fearing men, the faithful, those who remember God and
are restraining themselves from committing sins as described in many of Imam Ali’s words that attract everyone to his traits and noble character.

Thus others accept him as a role model and seek to follow and assimilate him.

It is narrated in Nahjul Balaghah that a companion of Imam Ali called Hammam who was a man devoted to worship said to him, "O' Commander of the Faithful, describe to me the pious man in such a way as though I see them." Imam Ali (AS) avoided the reply and said, "O Hammam, fear Allah and perform good acts because 'Verily, Allah is with those who guard (themselves against evil), and those who do good (to others)’" Hammam was not satisfied with this and pushed him to speak. Thereupon, Ali (AS) praised Allah and extolled Him and sought His blessings on the Holy Prophet and then spoke:

Thus, the God-fearing, in it are the people of distinction. Their speech is to the point, their dress is moderate and their gait is humble. They keep their eyes closed to what Allah has made unlawful for them, and they put their ears to that knowledge which is beneficial to them. They remain in the time of trials as though they remain in comfort. If there had not been fixed periods (of life) ordained for each, their spirits would not have remained in their bodies even for the twinkling of an eye because of (their) eagerness for the reward and fear of chastisement. The greatness of the Creator is seated in their heart, and, so, everything else appears small in their eyes. Thus to them Paradise is as though they see it and are enjoying its favours. To them, Hell is also as if they see it and are suffering punishment in it. Their hearts are grieved, others are protected from their evils, their bodies are thin, their needs are scanty, and their souls are chaste. They endured (hardship) for a short while, and in consequence they secured comfort for a long time. It is a beneficial transaction that Allah made easy for them. The world aimed at them, but they did not aim at it. It captured them, but they freed themselves from it by a ransom. During a night they are upstanding on their feet reading portions of the Qur’an and reciting it in a well-measured way, creating through it grief for themselves and seeking by it the cure for their ailments. If they come across a verse creating eagerness (for Paradise) they pursue it avidly, and their spirits turn towards it...
eagerly, and they feel as if it is in front of them. And when they come across a verse which contains fear (of Hell) they bend the ears of their hearts towards it, and feel as though the sound of Hell and its cries are reaching their ears. They bend themselves from their backs, prostrate themselves on their foreheads, their palms, their knees and their toes, and beseech Allah, the Sublime, for their deliverance. During the day they are enduring, learned, virtuous and God-fearing. Fear (of Allah) has made them thin like arrows. If any one looks at them he believes they are sick, although they are not sick, and he says that they have gone mad. In fact, great concern (i.e., fear) has made them mad. They are not satisfied with their meager good acts, and do not regard their major acts as great. They always blame themselves and are afraid of their deeds. (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

Imam Ali (AS) described these role models (i.e the pious men) in such a delicate, stunning and inspiring way that Hammam was ready to fly towards his beloved. That was the effect of Imam Ali’s impressive words on a man devoted to worship.

However, Imam Ali’s detailed description of the qualities of the role model is not confined to the pious men. In sermon 222 of Nahjul Balaghah, Imam Ali (AS) enumerates the benefits of remembering Allah mentioning, through the same method of describing a role model, the qualities of people who remember God so as to show the path to those who seek to follow noble and ideal role models.

A selection of his sayings is as such:

«إن الله سبحانه وتعالى جعل الذكر جلاء للقلوب تسمع به بعد الوجوّر وتبصر به بعد العشوّة وتنعف به بعد المعاناة وما برّح الله عزّ وجلّ ذكرixo in the days of Allah and making others feel fear for Him like guide-points in wildernesses. (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

4.3. Pattern elimination in Imam Ali’s lifestyle

Another method seen with Imam Ali’s normative conduct is model elimination in the sense that he describes the negative icons and characters in such a way that he creates a negative attitude and a feeling of disgust in the trainee towards the model. This educational method also is divided into direct and indirect as was the case with the first educational method.

1.4.3. Direct method

In this method, Imam Ali (AS) who is the perfect educator of humanity clearly and frankly forbids the trainees from accompanying and assimilating negative and harmful patterns. For
instance, in sermon 192 of Nahjul Balaghah, Imam Ali (AS) directly forbids from assimilating and following Cain, son of Adam, because he was arrogant and feigned superiority. He further points out his other demerits such as envy and vanity by saying:

Do not be like him who feigned superiority over the son of his own mother without any distinction given to him by Allah except the feeling of envy which his feeling of greatness created in him and the fire of anger that vanity kindled in his heart. Satan blew into his nose his own vanity, after which Allah gave him remorse and made him responsible for the sins of all killers up to the Day of Judgement. (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

In this saying, Cain is identified as a bad and evil example having bad characteristics such as arrogance, envy and spite. The Commander of the Faithful, Ali (AS) clearly and directly forbidding negative examples embarks on eliminating and eradicating them.

2.4.3. Indirect method

In this method, Imam Ali (AS) makes mention of negative examples without introducing them directly and clearly but through mentioning their negative characteristics, qualities and signs he wants the trainees to know them and distance themselves from them. The trainees seeing these signs and qualities begin to develop a negative attitude and distance themselves from those negative examples. This educational method has a considerable role in eliminating the negative symbols and example. By making mention of the qualities and characteristics of the negative symbols as well as the consequences thereof, he tries to introduce the negative examples so that others may avoid them.

For instance, people like Mu’awiyah, ‘Amr Aas, the Kharijites etc. are among the negative examples whom Imam Ali has introduced and he has, in most cases, made mention of their despicable and ugly characteristics. Thus, others become indirectly familiar with the negative personalities as well as develop hatred and disgust towards them as a consequence of which people with such characteristics cease to be considered as models.

In sermon 200 of Nahjul Balaghah, Imam Ali (AS) describes the character of Mu’awiyah as such:

By Allah, Mu’awiyah is not more cunning than I am, but he deceives and commits evil deeds. Had it not been for the reprehensibility of deceit, I would have been the most cunning of all men. But (the fact is that) every deceit is a sin and every sin is disobedience (of Allah),
and every deceitful person will have a banner by which he will be recognized on the Day of Judgement. (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

Imam Ali (AS) describes Mu’awiyah’s despicable, deceitful and corrupt character using plain and decisive words leaving no doubt for others that Mu’awiyah is a negative symbol whom one should steer well clear of.

Following the arbitration event, Imam Ali (AS) describes Musa Ash’ari and ’Amr Aas who were appointed as arbitrators and were known as prominent and trustworthy figures, as people who had left the right course and ignored the Quran. Thus, the Imam identifies them as negative symbols and indirectly dissuades the trainee from following them.

A selection of his words in this connection is as under:

«فَأَجِدُ رَأْيَ رَأْيَ مَلَائِكَةِ عَلٰٰمَةً فَأُخْبِرُوا عَلٰٰمَا أَنْ يُجَسِّدُوا عَلَى الْقُرْآنِ وَ لَا يَجاوِزُوا وَ تُوْمِيَّنَا عَلٰٰمَا أَنْ يُجَسِّدُوا فِي الْحُكْمِ بِالْعَدْلِ وَ الْعَمَلِ بِالْقِّسَوٌوءَ رَأِيْهِمَا وَ الْوَرَّاحِمُ قَدْ سَبَقَ اسْتِنَاءُهُمَا وَ الَّذٰيْنَ خَالَفُوا جِنْسَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ وَ لَا يُعْرُفُونَ مِنْ مَعْكُوسِ الْعَدْلِ وَ الْقِّسَوٌوءَ رَأِيْهِمَا وَ الْوَرَّاحِمُ...»

Your party had decided to select two persons, and so we took their pledge that they would act according to the Qur’an and would not commit excess, that their tongues should be with it and that their hearts should follow it. But they deviated from it, abandoned what was right although they had it before their eyes. Wrong-doing was their desire, and going astray was their behavior. Although we had settled with them to decide with justice, to act according to the light and without the interference of their evil views and wrong judgement. Now that they have abandoned the course of right and have come out with just the opposite of what was settled, we have strong ground (to reject their verdict). (Sayyid Razi, 1983)

It should be noted that it seems that in his method to remove the negative examples, Imam Ali (AS) very often acted in an indirect way. Very rarely did he embark on eliminating a model which is probably because eliminating a symbol in a direct way may cause the trainee to misunderstand things or misconceive. To put it in simple words, an example is presented here. For example, if a trainer tells the trainee ‘you should not be like Pharaoh’. The trainee is likely to think that he is arrogant and like Pharaoh and he is advised not to be like Pharaoh. Although in some cases the trainee may be as such and he does actually have that ugly and repulsive characteristic, in some cases, the educator may have directly taken preventive measures and warned, in a straightforward way, the trainee of the consequences of assimilating a negative role model. This could be the reason why there are fewer instances in Imam Ali’s sayings and conduct in which Imam Ali embarked on direct elimination of negative model. However, when it comes to indirect elimination of a role, no misconception or misunderstanding is likely to happen.

In the end, a chart showing Imam Ali’s model based education and its various divisions is provided in the next page. (Figure 1)
Figure 1

Types of Model based education according to Imam Ali (AS)

Introducing exemplar

Describing exemplar such as the sermon about the pious men

Eradication of exemplar

Direct

Indirect

Presenting himself as a model

Presenting the example of others such as the Holy Prophet (S), Malik Ashtar and Salman Farsi

Direct including Cain son of Adam

Indirect including Mu’awiyah, Amr Aas
Conclusion

One of the most important religious issues is the nurture and education of man without which the goal of man’s creation which is to achieve perfection and real happiness cannot be achieved. Imam Ali (AS) has made use of different methods to educate man the most important of which are: love, encouragement, punishment, reminding, enjoining good and forbidding wrong and a model-based method which enjoys special significance according to him.

Model refers to an important person or important individuals whom others seek to assimilate or emulate. Undoubtedly, such an individual must bear human virtues, merits and must be qualified and worthy of becoming a model; he should be someone capable of leading others to real perfection and happiness.

As for a model based method, it is a method based on presenting and giving tangible and practical instances with the educator endeavoring to show the trainee the ideal conduct and example so that the circumstances conducive to assimilation and emulation can be made available for the trainee. This method has certain advantages over other methods such as: being natural, objective, tangible, learning through direct observation, quick transfer of concepts, sustainability, instilling confidence in the trainee, and indirect instruction.

Imam Ali’s educational conduct is a model-based method divided into three subdivisions: i.e. presenting a model, making a model and elimination of model. In a model-based method, Imam Ali (AS) presents such positive and real models that are observable and have taken place in the concrete external world. This method is divided into direct and indirect forms. Sometimes, Imam Ali (AS) gives a direct order telling people to follow and assimilate the models. These models are by themselves divided into infallible and fallible categories.

The infallible models referred to in Imam Ali’s sayings are the Holy Prophet (S) etc. and the fallible models mentioned in his sayings are people like Khabbab bin Aratt, Malik Ashtar, etc.

Sometimes Imam Ali (AS) makes mention of the position and status of an ideal model encouraging the trainee indirectly to pick up and acquire his noble characteristics.

In a model-making method, Imam Ali (AS) describes and demonstrates the characteristics of the model paving ground for depiction and visualization of the model by simply mentioning his qualities and signs such as piety and remembrance of God.

Another method seen in Imam Ali’s educational conduct is to keep the negative model out of the limelight, to efface and eliminate them in the sense that he describes them in a way such that it creates a kind of disgust and negative attitude in the trainee towards them. This is too divided into direct and indirect methods.

In the direct method, Imam forbids the trainee from following and assimilating the infamous and negative models but in the indirect method, he simply describes a negative model seeking to dissuade and keep the trainee away.
In a model-based education method according to Imam Ali (AS), the good and ideal models and the bad and negative models have specific and distinguishing characteristics. The characteristics of positive models are: consistency between saying and practice, awareness, belief, simplicity. The characteristics of anti-religious and negative models are: hypocrisy, lying, innovation and breach of covenants.
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