

SPIRITUAL EDUCATION: THE IDEAL SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

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Human life is based on spiritual foundation and is guided by divine instructions. Spiritual education is unique in its content and curriculum, and its purpose. It is not pragmatic or instrumental. It is not even religious in its popular sense. It is something different from other perspectives of education. Spiritual education includes all forms of education — moral, sport, health, character, science and religious. The aim of spiritual education is to impart education among all citizens, regardless of gender, race, religion or caste, and to develop the spiritual personality of individuals as law-abiding and peaceful citizens. Parents in the family and teachers in the school should teach the children keeping in view the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development aspects. Furthermore, there is a need to understand the dynamics of the family and school as the social institutions, and the role of parents and teachers. This paper discusses in brief education and its importance, why spiritual education is necessary, the Islamic perspective of spiritual education, spiritual education and its implementation, and requisites of spiritual education. It also discusses characteristics of educators, and the rationale and process of spiritual development of the child. The role of parents and teachers in the social institutions (family and school) for the cultivation of spiritual excellence and spiritual development of children are suggested here.

Keywords: Spiritual education, divine instruction, spiritual personality

The education given by the Prophets to their disciples, or the function of the Prophets, is described precisely in the Holy Quran: “We have sent among you, of yourselves, a Messenger, to recite Our signs to you and to purify you, and to teach you the Book and Wisdom, and to teach you what you know not” (2:151).

Education in all respects relates to human resource development and management. The demand for quality in education manifested a sense of what is needed and a forecast of what is expected. The spiritually oriented education teaches us invariably the homogeneousness of the human mind. The ultimate utility of the positive relationship between spirituality and education should be towards the intellectual and moral direction of civilized society. Under such a homogeneousness of view and identity of aim, the behavioral scientist must naturally and gradually constitute a Body, in which the dissensions that now break up the physical world into coteries will merge; and with it the rivalry of struggling interests will cease and the aggression and violence which hinder scientific development in the present day will end.

Spiritual traditions are mainly drawn from philosophical, religious, psychological and sociological perspectives. Spiritual education has been with us for many centuries. But the advent of a post-modern world has brought a revival of spirituality. Under the system of spiritually-oriented education, morality will be based upon positive philosophy as a whole. Human experience being one of the important aspects of spirituality, it will be understood how children are to be trained in developing good habits and character by means of cultivating spiritual values, and how those behaviors are to be rationalized and interpreted, in order to establish the human duties of spiritual man -- personal, domestic, social and organizational -- with the modifications required by changes in civilization. For the present society, spirituality is certainly the one which, duly systematized, can at once generate universal moral convictions and develop the spiritual personalities to regulate the social norms. At the same time, the spiritual personality can be fully developed only by cultivating the spiritual values or positive virtues, because it helps in understanding human behavior.

Social disorders such as aggression and violence, love of this world's wealth, cultural instability, power, crimes, predominance of evils and vices, domestic violence and so forth have captured our mind and robbed the whole world. These robbers have disturbed world unity and peace.

The Holy Qur'ân is the one which provides us true knowledge of spiritual education. There is one God and the Supreme God who maintains our physical, social and mental health (i.e., spiritual health). The one God who created the one world we have divided into seven continents. Similarly, we perceive the physical and non-physical being differently. Spiritual education is only the mode which will show the way of true knowledge and attainment of spiritual excellence. Those who have implemented it are satisfied.

This article discusses in brief education and its importance, spiritual education, its implementation and requisites, and why it is necessary, the role of family and school as the educational institutions and their importance in the contemporary world. The concept of education and its importance is emphasized here. Besides, the author has suggested the characteristics of educators, and gives due stress on spiritual development of children.

Education: Definition and its Importance

Education has been defined variously according to the psychosocial needs of society. Education develops a healthy personality, character, and positive attitudes which make an individual a good citizen. In the process of education we try to shape the behavior of young children in accordance with aims and goals of national life. In other words, education can be defined as shaping of behavior or modification of individual behavior for adequate adjustment in society.

Education is important for both individual and societal development. It is a well known fact that education has influenced our society and culture in so many ways. Keeping in consideration its importance, education has been made compulsory in school in order to develop skills and abilities among pupils to deal effectively with daily life and learning problems.

Gülen has rightly pointed out that “given the great importance of learning and teaching, we must determine what is to be learned and taught, and when and how to do so. Although knowledge is a value in itself, the purpose of learning is to make knowledge a guide in life and illuminate the road to human betterment” (Ünal & Williams, 2000, p. 309). Thus, it may be said that it is not the knowledge of the subject matter alone which makes a good citizen.

Why is Spiritual Education Necessary?

The present state of spiritual education is in the domains of religious and moral education. My main aim is to present the possible future development and to encourage the educationists to agree with me and to stimulate their spiritual intelligence, thinking and pedagogy in contemporary education.

Toynbee (1948) in his twelve-volume review of human history stated that spiritual teachings provide the seed from which a civilization develops. Educators need to study the principles and values taught by the major world religions and incorporate them into the school curriculum. For example, The Virtues Project is a values education program that has made humankind's spirituality, as defined in the world's religious scriptures, central to its curriculum. When individuals combine understandings derived from science, philosophy and religion with their personal experiences and intuitions they will have a more complete knowledge of the reality of the universe than if any knowledge system is relied on exclusively.

There is no doubt that science subjects such as mathematics, physics and chemistry, arts and social sciences such as literature, psychology, economics, and medicine develop the proficiency and knowledge and make an individual perfect. But real knowledge means alleviating the evils and vices from the heart. This attitude of mind, this enlightenment is real knowledge. It develops integration of mind, heart and spirit.

Man is acquiring knowledge and obtaining degrees and wants to acquire social and political power, which he feels will give him strength. He would be more boastful and proud rather than knowledgeable. Scientific knowledge has worked wonders for the materialistic world and its sources have also sown the seeds of destruction. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. remarked that: “The means by which we live have outdistanced the ends for which we live. Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.” As a psychologist, I think *spiritual*

education is one of the most appropriate fields today in the context of spiritual development of children. This vital issue concerns the future of humanity.

Gülen has remarked: “the main duty and purpose of human life is to seek understanding”. Furthermore, Gülen stated that “Our principal duty in life is to acquire perfection and purity in our thinking, conceptions, and beliefs. By fulfilling our duty of servanthood to the Creator, Nourisher and Protector, and by penetrating the mystery of creation through our potentials and faculties, we seek to attain to the rank of true humanity and become worthy of a blissful, eternal life in another exalted world” (Ünal & Williams, 2000, pp. 305-306).

Motives and emotions are the main determinants of human behavior. In general, it is observed that our mind, soul or spirit becomes hardened and gets infected due to spiritual diseases (i.e., negative emotions) such as envy, jealousy, hatred, deceit, and calumny. How can we then get cured (spiritually)? To me, the only remedy for coping with diseases of the heart is spiritual education. Spiritual education can be imparted for preserving spiritual health and maintaining spiritual discipline.

All schools are required to foster spiritual development of their students; therefore, spiritual education is necessary in every country. Different approaches to spiritual education, include type of school (religious and mainstream), cross-curricular teaching, i.e., moral, ethical, religious, social, health, spiritual education convey a sense of future direction of the subject. Spiritual education courses should be introduced at the secondary, senior secondary, college and university levels.

Spiritual Education: Islamic Perspective

Islam founded a most brilliant civilization. The Qur’an begins with the injunction: Read: In the Name of your Lord Who creates (96:1). The Qur’an told people to read when there was very little to read and most people were illiterate. What we understand from this apparent paradox is that humanity is to “read” the universe itself as the “Book of Creation” (Gülen, 2005).

Islam focuses on the development of all human faculties, including, heart, mind, spirit or soul. The Holy Qur’an sensitizes all of our inner and outer senses, develops knowledge about the code of conduct and spiritual principles related to almost every field of education. Prophet Muhammad’s method of education was for training minds and spirits of students and for the development of characteristics of an ideal man. His teachings were more towards humanity.

Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W (blessings and peace be upon him)) being a spiritual person enlightened his companions intellectually and nurtured them spiritually. They were scientists, Qur’anic exegetes, traditionists, jurists, spiritual guides, and scholars of humanities. The vast majority of people who have benefited through the Prophet were non-Arab, and have used the Qur’an and Sunnah as the foundational sources of their academic studies and endeavors.

The Qur’an attaches importance to education and speaks of the supreme value of knowledge in more than one chapter and advises man to acquire it. The Book itself begins with an imperative to read: “Read in the name of your Lord Who created man from a blood-clot.” (Al-Qur’an, 96:1-2). “Read and your Lord is more generous Who taught man by the pen.” (Al-Qur’an, 96:2-4)... It emphasizes the value of the ink and the pen (Al-Qur’an, 68:1). The Qur’an is full of emphasis on the value of thinking, of pondering, of the ability to use rational faculties and discrimination.

Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W) also preached that knowledge is the most valuable asset for both the individuals and the Umma, his actual words being “Acquire knowledge, for he who acquires it in the Way of God performs an act of piety.” Further on, the Prophet (S. A. W) says, “Who speaks of it (knowledge) praises God; who seeks it adores God; who gives it to another, bestows alms...knowledge enables its possessors to distinguish good from bad; it lights the way to Heaven; it is our friend in the desert, and a guide to happiness. It helps us in misery, and is an ornament before friends. It is armor against the enemies. With knowledge, the servant of God rises to greater heights, and noble qualities, and attains to the perfection of happiness.”

Those who follow the Qur’an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W) will reach the highest realm of spirituality through knowledge, piety and righteousness. Those who will seek knowledge and science through spiritual education will show the exemplary life in every sphere of activity.

Education creates awareness and consciousness among human beings. That is why spirituality relates well with education and the acquisition of knowledge in Islam. Both in the Qur'an and in the Hadith (Traditions) of our Prophet (S. A. W), Muslims are asked to educate themselves, to acquire knowledge and to seek knowledge even if one has to travel to a far distant place such as China. The first verse revealed to our Prophet (S. A. W) stresses on reading. Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala commanded mankind to "Read, Read in the name of the Creator." Islam assigns a particular role to the quest for knowledge and spread of education. The Holy Qur'an has given great emphasis on attainment of knowledge and that all knowledge comes from God. The Holy Qur'an is the source of knowledge par excellence. The Holy Prophet (S. A. W) received the Revelation and brought to man the Holy Qur'an as it was revealed to him by Allah the Most High who thus brought to man the knowledge. The Prophet (S. A. W) also advised, "Avoid ignorance, seek learning, and always endeavor to add to it and pray God to help you."

Spiritual education develops the discipline of the mind, heart and spirit of the students. It provides opportunities for students to be creative, excellent and imaginative. It encourages students to understand themselves and nature. It values service for the welfare of others. A spiritualized curriculum enhances mental and spiritual knowledge and skills. It is integrative across all disciplines emphasizes inter-relationship and inter-connectedness. It helps students to set high goals and attain the highest perfection in life.

Spiritual Education and Its Implementation

With respect to spiritual education, changes in the curriculum of national schools, international schools and their evaluation systems and changes in the socio-economic context are of paramount importance. I believe that academic education or achievement no longer seems to be adequate for human spiritual development. Spiritual education is needed for spiritual development of children.

Introducing spiritual education at the different levels requires the following considerations:

- Books should be overtly pedagogical i.e., books should familiarize the student with the vocabulary, language and the explanation of terms and discussion so that they can grasp and understand the topics of the subjects.
- Authors of the books should be able to feel confident that they have covered the major areas of content.
- Books should convey the message of current debates in the field and point out growth and change.
- Books should be written by the experienced professional teachers and researchers who have worked in that area of education.
- The curriculum of spiritual education should be prepared such that it represents spiritual diversity.

Spiritual education can pay attention to the following aspects:

- a) management and leadership
- b) cross-curricular teaching
- c) one or more of the perspectives (i.e., philosophical, religious, psychological and sociological).

Spiritual education cannot be imparted solely through books; rather it can be learned from one who has already performed this journey.

Family as an Institution

The family, which is the basic unit of society, is now disintegrating. The family system in Islam pays due regard to the rights of the husband, wife, children and relatives. It nourishes positive behavior (generosity, love and affection) in the framework of a well-organized family system. The peace, unity, safety and security offered by a stable family are greatly valued, and seen as essential for the spiritual development of its members.

The family is one of the fundamental units of society, in which children are reared by the parents. As Gülen has pointed out “the home is vital to raising of a healthy generation and ensuring a healthy social system or structure” (Ünal & Williams, 2000, p. 311). Rapid development of technology is increasingly producing a highly industrialized society that has affected the foundations of some basic social units such as the family in terms of the reduced cohesiveness and a diffusion of interpersonal roles. It has disintegrated the joint family system as well as threatened the nuclear family with the increasing problems of disturbance and disintegration. Domestic violence seems to be a by-product of family. Individual personal peace seems to be at stake; unhappiness, dissatisfaction and alienation are becoming common at home. The quality of family life has vast implications on the quality of life of our children in terms of their attitudes, perceptions, thinking, emotions and feelings.

Spiritual growth and excellence has been closely associated with cultivation of good manners, etiquette and socio-cultural traditions in the new generation through the socialization process. The lesson of spiritual education in the form of cultivation of spiritual values should be imparted to the children at home. Virtues such as benevolence, respect, piety, truthfulness, fortitude, trustworthiness, steadfastness, goodwill, justice, patience, forgiveness and self-restraint which seem to be directly related to peace and unity should be practically demonstrated by the parents in their routine life.

Parents play a vital role in developing the right kind of attitude in a child, since a child spends most of his time at home. There is a good deal of agreement among psychologists that early childhood experiences play a crucial role not only in the cognitive development of children (Clarke, 1984), but also in shaping their potentiality. The child’s interaction with family members through positive communication would help in developing potentialities, self-esteem and self-confidence. In addition to fulfilling the biological and psychological needs of children, the parents are to take moral responsibility for bringing them up as ideal citizens. The parents as well as other family members are to observe certain duties with regard to the role of the child for individual and societal development. That is, the children should learn to live as a members of their own family, and later on as a member of a larger community (i.e., nation). Gülen has also emphasized the quality of relationship between parents, between parents and their children, and cultivation of good manners and virtues (i.e., compassion and benevolence) in the child.

School as an Institution

Educational institutions have a definite role to play in the personality development of the child. The role of education at the primary level has tremendous implications. The school puts a lot of pressure on the child for engaging in several competitions in education. Development of co-operation should be emphasized in education instead of encouraging children to indulge in competitions. For spiritual growth and excellence, the school should provide opportunities for play, group activities and artistic expression. Since the roots of behavior are nurtured in school during childhood, the school environment should be supportive enough for the healthy development of the child’s personality.

The school environment has a very significant role, but it fails to provide a clear direction for development and growth in different spheres. Education of children should aim at the qualitative transformation to develop them into responsive, harmonistic members of society imbued with self-sacrifice and service, and value oriented individuals to face the problems of the future and challenges in different spheres of life. For attaining this goal, spiritual education is envisaged.

No educational program can be successful unless the teachers are affectionate, empathic, and have humility, patience, wisdom, and steadfastness; and the concern for the students’ well-being. The training of the teachers at the B.Ed. and M.Ed. levels should be spiritually-oriented. In this regard, Gülen has rightly said that the school must be as perfect as possible in terms of the curriculum,

teachers' scientific and moral standards, and school physical conditions (Ünal & Williams, 2000, p. 310).

Requisites of Spiritual Education

An education system is guided by its universality, comprehensiveness, and quality of its students (Gülen, 2005, p. 189). This refers to the content of the course in various disciplines of education. The course content must be geared towards the spiritual development of students, irrespective of their religious faith, intellectual levels, gender or race. Moreover, the emphasis should be towards developing good behavior, and for becoming a good citizens, and to protect the future of humanity. Despite socio-cultural, scientific and technological revolutions, courses should be universal and unique in their content. The quality of a student should be judged by his uniqueness; he should be like no other man.

The educational system must foster behavior modification of students. Students must be trained for attaining the higher degree of spiritual perfection. This can only be possible if we include topics such as eradication of evils and vices, cultivation of good behavior, purification of the heart, and devotion to God. The Holy Qur'an covers the topics related to all aspects of life. The orientation and content of the curriculum from primary to college/university level should be strengthened to produce spiritually intelligent, creative, and positive thinking students.

Organizational climate is also a matter of great concern in relation to introduction of spiritual education. Many world renowned scholars have received education in the school of Muhammad (S.A.W). God has honored humanity with great heroes, and great scientists. They have formed good impression with respect to the development of many fields.

The teacher's personality and his or her role are responsible for imparting spiritual education. A teacher must be insightful, considerate, persevering and fair-minded to every student who seeks help and must work towards the spiritual development of students. Teachers should be faithful and conscious of the duties expected of them and must set a good example for their students in terms good behavior and accomplishments. They should be competent with content and pedagogical knowledge.

Spiritual Development: Rationale and Process

Humans have a "fractured worldview" and "distorted perception" about mankind. I therefore, suggest the need to give serious thought to the spiritual development of children in order to provide them the right direction for attaining world peace and unity under a holistic (i.e. spiritual) approach.

In the words of Husain and Ahmad (2005), "both individual and societal behavior is directly controlled by political, economic and social system. The thought-content of guiding philosophy of this civilization is accompanied by number of evils and ism: nationalism, regionalism, casteism, consumerism and above all, a ravaging terrorism. For more than a decade, terrorism has fragmented mankind into deadly hostile functions and has driven nations into nuclear insanity rampaging East and West" (p. 43). It has affected world peace and unity. It is obvious to every holistically conscious human being in the world today, that in the Nuclear Age, if we do not abolish war, terrorism, aggression and violence, they are going to abolish us.

Spiritual development of the child is therefore, necessary for exploring the true meaning of his existence and the path to righteousness. Parents as well as teachers should take up the responsibility to cultivate the spiritual values, namely, benevolence, steadfastness, wisdom, love, tolerance, truthfulness, trustworthiness, sincerity, and righteousness among children. Since these values are emphasized in every Holy Book, they can bring mankind under a similar ideological synthesis. Our effort of cultivating the spiritual values is thus guided by a sense of obligation towards peace and unity.

Education with respect to the spiritual development of students depends much upon the greatness and qualities of the teacher. An educator's greatness depends on the continuation of his or her principles (Gülen, 2005, p. 186). Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W) as an illustrious educator, trained a number of spiritual instructors and guides, and these were deputed to various countries such as Egypt, Iran, China and Yemen. to spread the knowledge they had learned from him. Parents and

teachers can make the effort towards the spiritual development of children following the principles of Islam and adopting the Prophet Muhammad's lifestyle.

In the words of Gülen (2005), "Prophet Muhammad had a holistic view of each individual. He took all of their mental and spiritual capacities and developed them, turning his own wretched people into paragons of virtue. His wisdom in assessing such potential is a proof of his Prophethood" (p. 187).

It is quite possible that one may remain happy and live in a peaceful society. An individual's spiritual health influences the world outside. When we feel peace and unity in our hearts and minds, it creates similar feelings in those around us. We are all born with an infinite number of spiritual qualities or values. One of the most important tasks in our life is to cultivate and develop as many of the spiritual values as possible, so that we can be spiritually healthy.

Characteristics of Educators

Parents and teachers should:

1. prepare in sacrificing their lives in the service of children for making them healthy citizens and purely for the sake of God.
2. be sincere and competent in educating children to the path of attaining peace and unity.
3. teach children in the manner that they can understand everything about the positive aspects of human behavior and thus help and alleviate their problems.
4. be influential orators and effective in speech that affect the behavior of children.
5. have positive thinking and perception, and in expressing positive emotions and show fairness toward others regardless of their religious faith, nationality, race/caste.
6. be well adjusted in social, physical and academic areas. They should be well-mannered in relationship with their children.
7. be spiritually intelligent. This implies that they should use their energy in the cultivation of good deeds and virtues among children.
8. be generous and altruistic for the children. Those parents or teachers who regard everything as a gift from God understand that they can benefit others only if He allows them to do so.
9. dedicate themselves towards improving the well-being of children in educational, personal and social spheres.
10. work towards maintaining spiritual discipline of children, namely discipline of the body, mind, heart, spirit or soul.

Kabbani (2008) has suggested certain conditions for being a spiritual teacher. They are as follows:

- The shaykh must be deeply imbued with the knowledge of the religion, both external and esoteric.
- He must inherit from the Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W) and all his predecessors the ability and Divine Support to guide his followers in the externals of the religion and its inner realities.
- He must be a scholar, well-versed in all religious obligations, such as the conditions of prescribed prayers, fasting, *zakāt* and hajj.
- He must be knowledgeable in Islamic jurisprudence and all necessary matters of the Divine Law.
- He must be a scholar in the science of monotheism and all the other conditions of faith.
- He must have the knowledge of the conditions of the state of excellence.
- He must have already purified and sanctified himself as a seeker under a guide of his own. Thus, he will have come to know the different stages of the ego, its illnesses and its defects. The guide must be fully aware of all the methods Satan uses to enter the

breast and know all the ways to sanctify others and methods to heal his followers in order to raise them up to the state of perfection.

The shaykh must have authorization from his teacher to train his followers, authorization which must extend through a lineage of teachers all the way back to the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). As the wise person will not go to a doctor who has no license in healing, so the seeker in this way must find a perfect guide who has received the license, the permission, from his shaykh.

Conclusion

God, the Exalted, has said: "O self at peace! Return unto your Master, well-pleased, well-pleasing" (89: 27-28). Higher than the self at peace is the self perfectly purified. Those who rise to this degree of attainment are the nearest to God. Those who want to attain and maintain peace and unity in this world must first demonstrate their feelings and emotions into their actions. They must purify their minds and hearts, and must strive for personal control and to maintain spiritual discipline.

Linking spirituality with education can be an antidote for religious or moral education. Spiritual education is an intrinsically rational and functional force for organizing the effective cognitive functioning in terms of positive perception and thinking. Its status as worth studying for individual development will require additional conceptualization and debate in education circles.

Spiritual values should be cultivated among children. According to Lickona (1991), the purpose of character education programs is to foster virtues and spiritual maturity so as to produce productive and socially responsible members of society. Lickona discussed how humility is a component of good character. A spiritual education program would encompass cultivation of spiritual values for spiritual development as described in this article. Tethering spirituality and education enables knowledge about the spiritual ways of understanding human behavior that might be highly beneficial for the nation's well-being.

The privilege of spiritually-oriented education should be to establish the relationship between the various populations by an identical educational basis, in order to establish a free and healthy society. Such an education must have an Asian character; because the civilization of Asian countries is based upon values and morality. Hence we are qualified to receive it. The curriculum of spiritually-oriented education should be instrumental for satisfying the individual higher order needs besides satisfying the social need of all societies. The demands of individual and society are to have free way, and to be pursued up to the point of universality, which is the only limit of spiritual education

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