

# Chapter 4

## Traditional Texts and Contemporary Teaching Techniques

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter provides a synopsis of teaching techniques gleaned from traditional texts represented in Muslim canonical ḥadīth collections. To begin with, the life of Prophet Muḥammad is surveyed from a teacher's perspective. Thereafter, narratives which illuminate pedagogical strategies are analyzed to emphasize the need for teachers to have a repertoire of teaching methods. It is argued that the techniques derived from traditional texts are relevant as they resonate with contemporary educational ideas.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Muslims believe that they are guided by the practice of the Messenger Muḥammad in various aspects of their life and work. It is therefore relevant to consider his practice in the context of teaching, learning and education. This chapter aims to survey his life from a teacher's perspective and focuses on selected traditions which illuminate pedagogical strategies he used, demonstrating the need to take into account individual needs when teaching. Some of these methods are relevant as they resonate with contemporary educational ideas.

The article begins with a consideration of the meaning of *ḥadīth* and proceeds to present an overview of literature related to the life of Muḥammad to show the ways in which his life has been studied, indicating the significance of what he did and

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taught. Thereafter several teaching methods are analysed and principles highlighted. The article concludes by highlighting the need for Muslim educators, in particular, to maintain such principles and incorporate these methods in their repertoire of teaching methods. For the purpose of this article it must be taken as read that the author considers Prophet Muḥammad to be a good teacher.

*Ḥadīth* literally means communication, conversation or something new. Technically, it stands for what can be attributed to Prophet Muḥammad of his deeds, sayings and tacit approvals (Mattson, 2013; Saud, 2013). *Sunnah* is the way of life of Prophet Muḥammad and *sunnah* means a recommended course of action. It also refers to the model behavior of Muḥammad (Azami, 1992; Burton, 1994). In common parlance, *ḥadīth* and *sunnah* are used interchangeably.

Muslim tradition also emanates both from Muḥammad, as developed and inspired by him, and from those around him. This became the basis for an ongoing tradition in which scriptures are interpreted and reinterpreted (Mattson, 2013). So the Prophet and the traditions he initiated and inspired offer complex insights into ways of teaching, learning, understanding and remembering the scriptures that are still beneficial for students today. Taking such an approach makes learning and teaching to be more contextualised, cumulative and personally integrated.

## **Background**

The life of Muḥammad has fascinated and has been debated by both Muslim and non-Muslim researchers within various disciplines. Before considering his educational contribution it is valuable to acknowledge the range of subjects authored around his personality to illustrate his multifaceted contribution to human and cultural development. For instance, Guillaume (1955) and Lings (1991) utilised earliest sources to present his historical biography. Whereas, Watt (1961) depicted the socio-political environment during which Muḥammad emerged. Armstrong (1993) attempted to appreciate and understand Islam by focussing on him as a Prophet. She showed considerable insight and sensitivity and challenged previously held notions about Muḥammad by some Orientalists. Refutations of some of these allegations, related to his marriages, his integrity and use of violence are attempted by Haykal (1989). Mansoorpuri (1988), on the other hand, provided a scholarly analysis of his biographical narrative and Schimmel (1985) focussed on his unique position in the life of his followers.

Other works reflect and critique his various roles such as that of final messenger, commander and perfect model for humanity. Bauben (1996), in addition to sketching negative medieval images in the works of influential writers, also acquainted readers with the exemplary life of Muḥammad. In his book, *In Search of Muḥammad*, Bennett (1998) highlighted the significance of Muḥammad to Muslims based on the views of

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