

## BORDER CROSSINGS

# Examination of the “Theory of Guidance” in the View of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a): An Exploration into the Nahj Al-Balaghah

Abas Ali Rostami-Nasab<sup>a</sup>, Oranus Tajedini<sup>a</sup>, and Ali Sadatmoosavi<sup>b,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Educational Sciences, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman, Kerman, Iran; <sup>b</sup>Department of Information Science and Knowledge Management, Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran; <sup>c</sup>Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the “Theory of Guidance” according to ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a). This theory is based on three divine covenants or fundamentals in guidance including the divine Prophet, the divine Book, and the divine human nature (*fitrat*). Research in this regard seems essential because this theory has not been previously considered or researched in the discipline of education. Research findings indicate that all three of the pedagogic fundamentals—namely *the teacher*, *the student*, and *the subject matter*—are essential elements in guidance. Education can be properly realized through the interaction of these constituents enabling attainment of a status worthy of humankind. It is important to note that the teacher, the student, and the subject matter each have their own place, and none can take the place of another. In this relationship, the teacher begins the educational process. It is the teacher who must understand the role of each of these elements and guide them wisely. In order to fulfill the process of education, the teacher must be prepared to receive guidance, understand the position and character of the student, and have a good command of the topic in a way that matches the nature and needs of the student.

## Introduction

In educational systems based on a philosophical school or ideological system, there are differences in the manner in which the interaction between the basic elements of education is delineated, namely *the teacher*, *the student*, and *the subject matter*. This difference may lie in prioritization of the teacher, the student, or another element. Depending on the focus, the function and status of the teacher and student as well as the extent each affects character development may vary.

The study of the works by great philosophers and teachers suggests that they paid particular attention to the role of guidance in education. Frederick Mayer points to the importance of guidance in the education of ancient Chinese and Hebrew,

In their opinion, the absolute truth is achieved only with the help of a guide. Chinese regard nature as the guide to human being and believe reason to be able to detect the

**CONTACT** Ali Sadatmoosavi  [moosavi56@gmail.com](mailto:moosavi56@gmail.com)  Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Ebn-e-Sina Street, Kerman 7619813159, Iran.

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guidance path introduced by nature and act on its basis. Moreover, they consider obedience to family and traditions as the pivot of guidance. (Mayer, 1995).

The Greeks held similar views. Socrates believed, “If the soul consults with reason and follows what is divine and eternal, it steps on the right path and truly leads everything to prosperity. But if it is subject to ignorance and irrationality, it will bring about the opposite results” (Plato, 1988, Vol. 4: 2359).

For ancient Indians, the social class privilege and for ancient Persians, aristocratic, military, and moral criteria were the guides to education (Roger, 1977). Zoroaster, the religious leader and educational teacher of ancient Iran, considered Ahura Mazda’s satisfaction as the educational guide. This satisfaction is gained through understanding and fulfilling the commands given in Avesta by Zoroaster. He thought of human as having reason and wisdom. Human soul was seen as a mediator living in human body during his life and joining its origin beyond this worldly life after death (Ashtiani, 1995).

Jesus Christ, who is one of the paragons of guidance sent by God, believed the guidance to be received by being kind to other human beings. He guided his followers to understand the truth, surrender, and achieve God’s satisfaction. Reason would be utilized to recognize the commands of God, conscious performance, sincere love and true humility. Thus, both reason and inspiration are guides and reason acts based on inspiration. Influenced by the thoughts of Jesus Christ, Thomas Aquinas knew reason, faith, science, theology, nature and supernatural as educational guides. He believed that reason, which reveals the Majesty of God, is donated to all humans and as it shines, education and edification will be flourished (Mayer, 1995). In the age of enlightenment, guidance was taken into consideration with accordance to the subjects required and related to stages of human development by Rabelais, Vives, Erasme, and Montaigne.

In Quran, which is the Book of guidance in Islam, inspiration, divine Prophet and human nature (*fitrat*) are mentioned as human guides in verse 32 of the Quranic chapter Al-e-Imran and verse 58 of chapter Al-Baqara. Therefore, with piety and taking thought to the instructions of God, one can be guided in the straight path and obtain permanent prosperity.

Farabi pointed out,

The purpose of creation of human being is to gain eternal prosperity (absolute goodness). To achieve this, first prosperity needs to be clarified and be set as the final goal. Thereafter, the actions required to obtain prosperity should be identified and performed. Since humans are different in their natures (*fitrat*), no one can recognize the prosperity by nature. Moreover, no one is able to distinguish and do what is worth doing as there is a need to a guide in every case (Farabi, 1992).

Martin Buber defined *teacher* as *guide*, “The duty of a teacher is to guide the creative power of a child to the right path intended to communicate with others” (Yaron, 1993). Blonsky believed that human being has natural abilities

and innate development based on which education needs to be provided (Danilchenko, 1993). Alfred Binet also believed that a teacher must know the personal capabilities of students and do his/her duties on its basis (Zazzo, 1993). In Western texts, these theories include education in idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, and Marxism (Shari'atmadari, 1993).

According to the mentioned documents, almost all scholars from ancient times, medieval centuries and the age of enlightenment until now have considered the concept and role of guidance in education directly or indirectly. However, the relationship between guidance and education has not been investigated based on three dimensions, namely teacher, student, and subject matter, practically and interactively. This relationship needs to be illuminated so as to prove all the three as guidance factors effective on education.

Among schools of thought that discuss education, the Islamic school is one of the most proactive and resolute. To explain, education and the accrual of knowledge is one of the most pivotal personal and social programs of this theological school. "Read in the Name of your Lord who created... Read, and your Lord is the most generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know" (The Holy Quran, 2008, 96, pp. 1-5). The Lord is the first teacher of this school. The first student in Islam was the holy Prophet (s) and Ali (a) was raised by the Prophet (s). After the Holy Quran and traditions of the Prophet, Ali's Nahj al-Balaghah is the best resource on the needs of human beings in the path of eternal happiness (Al-Nawawi, 1980; Hasanzade Amoli, 2001). Ali ibn Abi Talib is the first Imam in all Shia branches and the fourth guided caliph among Sunnis. He is also the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, the holy prophet of Islam (Nasr, 2016). He has a particularly significant place in Islamic culture. Accordingly, his scientific position is taken into consideration in various disciplines of Islamic sciences.

In some of these sciences, particularly in science of discourse (Kalam), there are fundamental discrepancies between Sunni and Shia. Nevertheless, in Islamic mysticism (Irfan) there are certain similarities of ideas about Imam Ali's spiritual and mystical character. He has a very high position among Shia beliefs and approving his legitimacy as the leader of Muslims is a determinant belief. His words are regarded as references to Shia jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) (Gleave, 2016). According to Encyclopedia Britannica, in recent Islamic philosophy, particularly in the teachings of Mulla Sadra named Transcendent Wisdom, the sermons and sayings of Ali ibn Abi Talib are known as the main sources of philosophical knowledge and divine wisdom. He is also recognized as the first person to use Arabic expressions to render philosophical ideas. Furthermore, his saying that, "look at what has been told not at who has told it" states the main characteristic of Islamic thought (Nasr, 2016). Accordingly, schools have priority over persons and thoughts are judged by their inner value rather than by their historical references (Kattani<sup>1</sup>, 2009).

A great number of short sayings of Ali ibn Abi Talib formed parts of Islamic general culture. Arab authors have asserted the unique eloquence of his sermons and speeches (Madelung, 2003). Several books are dedicated to his sayings, sermons and prayers the most important of which is Nahj al-Balaghah (Hosseyni, 2001). Al-Sharif Al-Radi, one of the most prominent Shia researchers, collected a great number of sermons, letters and short sayings of Ali ibn Abi Talib on different topics in Nahj al-Balaghah in the 10th century, which became one of the most popular and influential books of the Islam world. Although some western researchers doubt its accuracy, it has always been approved by Muslims. It is still regarded as a religious, literary and inspiring source by Shia and Sunni (Abi'l-Hadid, 1959; Nasr, 2016). Many first-class literary scholars of the Arab world including Abdul Hamid Al-Katib (the 2nd century) (Razi, 1998), Al-Jahiz (1926) (the 3rd century), Qudama ibn Ja'far (the 4th century), ibn Abi Al-Hadid (the 6th century) (ibid) and Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi (the 8th century) have praised the eloquence of Nahj al-Balaghah (Al-Amini Al-Najafi, 1980).

The Nahj al-Balaghah is a rich primary source among Islamic texts. Its entire content is consistent with the Holy Quran. The Nahj al-Balaghah discusses human issues and needs. Examination of the Nahj al-Balaghah, especially the first sermon, the sermons of Qasi'ah and Muttaqin, and letter 31 reveals that 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (a) has shown special regard for educative guidance, specifically in relation with the three pillars of education and edification, namely the teacher, the student, and the subject matter. Since in Nahj al-Balaghah Ali ibn Abi Talib has obviously emphasized the interactive role of teacher, student and subject matter in guidance, the researchers attempted to investigate the role of guidance and education presented by Ali ibn Abi Talib in Nahj al-Balaghah. Thus, this study makes use of the seemingly endless sea of divine knowledge that is the Nahj al-Balaghah to examine the function of the primary elements of guidance and education. Specifically, this study is an investigation of the "Theory of Guidance" according to Ali (a) in the Nahj al-Balaghah. This theory is based on three divine covenants, or perhaps fundamentals, in guidance including the divine Prophet, the divine Book, and the divine human nature (*fitrat*). Understanding and acting upon these fundamentals sets the process of education upon its proper, natural path.

Research has not been performed on this theory in the discipline of education. In light of the modern crisis in the humanities, it seems that research in this area is not only important but also necessary. The importance and necessity of the matter has led the authors of the current work to consider this matter as a primary research question. The basic purpose of this paper is, succinctly, examination of the role of the primary elements of guidance and education (i.e., teacher, student, and subject matter) in the view of Imam Ali (a) in the Nahj al-Balaghah.

## Literature review

Valuable works are published concerning education in Nahj al-Balaghah in the form of journal, article and book including:

- The role of teacher in religious education by Davoudi (2011) which has focused on educational aspects.
- Education in Islam by Motahari (2007) which has investigated education in general.
- Instruction and education from the standpoints of Shahid Thani and Imam Khomeini by Fahri (1983).

Another work in this area is Education in Nahj al-Balaghah by Zahadat (2001). This book discussed the 31st letter of Ali ibn Abi Talib in Nahj al-Balaghah addressed to his son, Hasan ibn Ali. What was paid considerable attention by the researcher was that Ali ibn Abi Talib built trust with his son so as to educate him. In this viewpoint, the interaction between teacher and student was emphasized.

Certain other works have also been published regarding the educational viewpoints of the household of the holy prophet particularly Ali ibn Abi Talib including: *An Introduction to School Education* (Mazloumi, 1987), *Meaning-Based Education from the Viewpoint of Infallible Imams* (Mazloumi, 1996), *Child Education in the School of the Household of the Prophet* (Najafi Yazdi, 1992), *Family in the School of Quran and the Household of the Prophet* (Arfa, 1986), *Manhaj Al-Tarbia Ind Al-Imam Ali* (Hosseini Adib, 1979), *Educational Proposal and Methods in Nahj al-Balaghah* (Dashti, 1989), *Science from the Point of View of Imam Ali* (Nadjafzadeh Bar Froosh, 1987), *Saadat Al-Tarbia Fi Nahj al-Balaghah* (As'ad, 1985), *Al-Wasiya Al-Khalid, the Explanation of Imam Ali's Will to his Son, Imam Hasan* (Al-Mousavi, 1985) and *Al-Fikr Al-Tarbawi Ind Shia Imamia* (Al-Ghazvini & Amir Muhammad, 2001). These works have partly investigated the educational viewpoint of Ali ibn Abi Talib on the ultimate goal, general, specific and behavioral objectives, educational fundamentals, educational principles, educational methods, subject matters and the duties of teacher and student. Nevertheless, none proposed a theory relevant to the topic of the present research.

## Research methodology

This research was a descriptive-analytic study based on library research (documentary method). First, a collection of sermons, letters and short sayings of Nahj al-Balaghah were scrutinized and the relevant notes were taken. Then, each note was given a particular title and classified as one of the main issues of the study. Thereafter, data were analyzed to carry the research as a logical and scientific system. It is worth mentioning that the main focus of this study was the words of Ali ibn Abi Talib in Nahj al-Balaghah. In some cases, other sources like Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim, Al-Hayat, Bihar

al-Anwar, Usul Al-Kafi as well as some verses from the Holy Quran were also cited. The researchers extracted and classified the required information from the Nahj al-Balaghah as well as other written documents before analysis and conclusion.

### **Research questions**

The present study addresses the following questions.

1. What is the meaning and significance of guidance in the view of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a)?
2. In the view of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a), what topics lead to guidance?
3. What types of guidance exist in the view of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a)?
4. In the view of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a), what characteristics must the guide possess?
5. Who are the paragons of guidance in the view of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a)?
6. In the view of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a), what characteristics must the disciple possess?

### **Definition of guidance**

The term guidance includes the concepts of leading, advising, teaching, directing to the correct path, clarifying, and saving from error (Dehkhoda, 1994, Vol. 14). The word *guidance* has been utilized a number of times in Quran but all uses refer to two main meanings: a) *existential guidance*: in Holy Quran, it is quoted from Moses, “our lord is he who gave everything its creation and then guided it;” and b) *legislative guidance*: the examples of which are frequently stated in Quran including “and appointed them leaders to guide by our command” (Sayar Atrash Langroudi, 1992; Tabaresi, 1998).

According to Imam Ali (a), guidance is the correct path; it is incompatible with error. He states, “Misguidance cannot accord with guidance even though they may be together ... He who seeks counsel from Allah secures guidance and he who adopts His word as guide is led “towards what is most upright” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons>, sermon 147). Elsewhere, he states, “And know that this Quran is an adviser who never deceives [and] a leader who never misleads” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, sermon 176). Therefore, based on this saying of Ali ibn Abi Talib, Quran is the book to guide humans.

Some experts believe that guidance is universal and that it does not does not have an opposite. In other words, no type of error counterbalances it. Everything in existence—including this world, the next world, the material world, and the abstract world—is based on the genetic guidance of God Almighty (Javadi Amoli, 1984). Guidance is determination of the proper state of and path to perfection for an object. Therefore, if perfection is not an

essential attribute of an entity, it requires guidance and augmentation to reach its respective state of perfection, regardless of whether the entity was created with inner perfection or must achieve this state by traversing the path of perfection and progressing from potentiality to actuality (Javadi Amoli, 1984).

## Subjects of guidance

Subjects of guidance are recognized operational guidelines that the guide issues in respect with the requirements for human perfection. Corresponding with the aptitude and capacity of students, they absorb and follow the guidelines as they progress through the stages of perfection simultaneously with the stages of natural growth to finally reach the purpose for which they were created.

It is of utmost importance to identify subjects that can answer human needs and lead people through the stages of perfection and to the state of ease and tranquility. People must be taught issues that fit their interests, abilities, and needs as well as those of human societies; issues that also make them happy and satisfied. As stated by Imam Ali (a), “the best companion is satisfaction” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, saying 4). Moreover, educational content must be in line with the purpose of human creation and also satisfy the Lord. In order of importance, the sources for identification of the desires and needs include the commandments of the Lord, persons themselves, and empirical human knowledge.

In the fetal and nursing periods as well as early childhood, the sources of guiding knowledge are divine commandments and empirical knowledge in the areas of human psychology and physiology. Afterwards, the sources of guidance consist of divine commandments in addition to the person’s own desires, reactions, and questions. During late childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and old age, it is important to understand one’s own needs and express them. Questions can enable identification of subjects of guidance and solutions to problems. According to Imam Ali (a), “A person who asks the proper questions will become erudite” (Al-Tamimi Al-Amadi, 2005, Vol. 5, p. 191). Elsewhere, he has stated, “Ask about that which you need to know and what you are not excused of knowing” (Al-Tamimi Al-Amadi, 2005, Vol. 4, p. 136). On similar lines, he has said, “Hearts are closed; their keys are questions” (Al-Tamimi Al-Amadi, 2005, Vol. 1, p. 374).

Thus, in the stages of life when persons have the ability to understand, the guide must know the questions of guidance, and disciples must express their problems clearly and correctly so that proper guidance can be identified, suggested, and received. Correct questions clarify the needs of a person as well as the subjects that need to be addressed. There are countless subjects in this seemingly endless universe. This being the case, the most fitting method for selection of topics is to create the best possible environment for free



expression of needs. Moreover, humans utilize the experience, understanding, and cognitive ability they gradually accumulate from the world around them to determine appropriate subjects of guidance. An example of this activity was cited in the sayings of Ali ibn Abi Talib, in the 31st letter addressed to Hasan ibn Ali. The whole letter was concerned with guidance as related to youth and its characteristics and natural development. They can be derived from others' experiences and be prescribed as guidance and educational subjects.

Certainly, the heart of a young man is like uncultivated land. It accepts whatever is strewn on it. So, I hastened to mould you properly before your heart hardened up and your mind became occupied. (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-2-letters-and-sayings>, letter).

In another part, he said,

Since I feel for your affairs as a living father should feel and I aim at giving you training, I thought it should be at a time when you are advancing in age and new on the stage of the world, possessing upright intention and clean heart (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-2-letters-and-sayings>, letter 31).

Ali ibn Abi Talib finds himself in charge of identifying guidance topics and guiding his son, Hasan ibn Ali. Thus, after some explanations about the biography and works of those in past, he stated (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-2-letters-and-sayings>, letter 31),

O my child, even though I have not reached the age which those before me have, yet I looked into their behaviour and thought over events of their lives. I walked among their ruins till I was as one of them. In fact, by virtue of those of their affairs that have become known to me it is as though I have lived with them from the first to the last. I have therefore been able to discern the impure from the clean and the benefit from the harm. I have selected for you the choicest of those matters and collected for you their good points and have kept away from you their useless points ... walk among their cities and ruins, then see what they did and from what they have gone away and where they have gone and stayed. You will find that they departed from (their) friends and remain in loneliness. Shortly, you too will be like one of them. Therefore, plan for your place of stay and do not sell your next life with this world.

History implies the influence of different phenomena on each other and that of new events on human beings in a constant and gradual trend. Furthermore, studying the history of those in the past introduces humans educated under various circumstances. This breadth conveys some advice for a better future, which tell us from where humans have come from, what they have done, and to where they would go. In fact, history involves the experiences that if people recognize them, they will not need to experience them anymore. Therefore, the duty of humans is to study the history so as to reveal more experiences and enrich them.



Imam Ali (a) considered himself responsible for not only identifying subjects of guidance, but also guiding his son, Imam Hasan (a). This is why, after explaining the importance of examining the lives and works of predecessors, the Imam states, “I have selected for you the choicest of those matters and collected for you their good points” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-2-letters-and-sayings>, letter 31). Accordingly, didactic materials true to human nature may be identified using experience as well as the desires and questions of the student.

The preceding discussion demonstrates that humans grow under the light of education, specifically when the subject matter corresponds to needs, interests, developmental stages, and purpose of creation. If the education students receive cannot make them independent and satisfied with their lives, they—as well as the community as a whole—have been betrayed. Education must be useful in social, economic, political, and cultural life as well as for life in the next world. It must bring dignity to the person as well as to their family and society. In this respect, the guide has a key role in guidance.

In the pedagogic view of Imam Ali (a), the proper form of guidance is guidance by God, which occurs in three ways. As discussed in following text, these ways include genetic guidance, legislative guidance, and guidance of religious people.

### ***Genetic guidance***

This type is universal and encompasses all of creation. In this form of guidance, God leads creatures toward the purpose inherent in their genesis (The Holy Quran, 2008, 6, p. 102). In a restricted sense as concerns human beings as the subject of this article, genetic guidance means that the Lord provides the speculative faculties of humans with special insight and their practical faculties with a special sort of attraction toward a certain goal so that comprehension or perception of divine teachings is realized and the path toward the ultimate destination is followed. This type of guidance belongs only to God (The Holy Quran, 2008, 6, p. 97).

### ***Legislative guidance***

In this type of guidance, God Almighty presents humans with guidelines for happiness. He enlightens people by encouraging virtue and forbidding evil so that they choose a path and reach its end by their own free will. Similar to genetic guidance, legislative guidance also belongs only to God (The Holy Quran, 2008, 48, p. 9). Legislative guidance is communicated to humans by appointees of God who receive revelation. Since humans have the benefit of legislative guidance, they can understand the commandments of God, observe them, and attain the worthy state of perfection.

Three divine covenants pertain to guidance and education. In sermon 1 of the Nahj al-Balaghah, Imam Ali (a) points these covenants out to the people. The divine link between these covenants culminates in the divine guidance of humans on the “straight path”. These covenants are as follows.

1. The covenant of the message or revelation to the prophets: Imam Ali (a) has said, “Allah chose prophets and took their pledge for His revelation and for carrying His message as their trust” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons>, sermon 1).
2. The covenant of human nature (*fitrat*): “Then Allah sent His Messengers and [a succession] of His prophets towards [the people] to get them to fulfil the pledges of His creation, to recall to them His bounties, to exhort them by preaching, to unveil before them the hidden virtues of wisdom and show them the signs of His Omnipotence” (Dashti, 1989).
3. The covenant of the Holy Quran or subjects of education: Imam Ali (a) has stated, “The Book of your Creator [is among you] clarifying its permission and prohibitions ... In it there are some verses whose knowledge is obligatory” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005).

Even with a cursory look at these three covenants, it is clear that God has established a fundamental relationship between them. He has made the growth and development of humans contingent on these fundamentals of education. If they are not understood, and if their features are not taken into consideration in curriculum design, crises will ensue from incorrect didactic activities.

With further examination of these covenants, it can be understood that guidance is a spiritual concept. The link between guidance and the teacher, the student, and the subject matter manifests differently in each. These three components combine to create understanding, obedience, and servitude in humans toward God. In this way, the true process of edification is realized and eternal human happiness can be achieved.

### ***Guidance of religious people***

This manner of guidance is reserved for servants advancing on the path of God. That is, a person who chooses the path of righteousness after right and wrong become clear. While continuing upon this path—this gift, as it were—the wayfarer is blessed with special divine grace. The path becomes clearer, the means for journeying further become available, and obstacles to progress are removed.

Considering the types of guidance, it is necessary for the student to comprehend the commandments of God in a monotheistic atmosphere. To attain happiness, the disciple must freely perform good deeds and avoid evil acts. In this way, the student will be subjected to the special guidance of God and gain divine virtues. The actions of such wayfarers are based on deep insight and

pure intentions to satisfy the Lord. They take on the mannerisms of God. It may be stated that they receive revelations due to proper purification (*tazkiyah*) and edification of the self.

### **Guides and their characteristics**

In education, the guide has a pivotal role. The ultimate guide is God Almighty. At His behest, Prophet Muhammad (s) and the Infallible Imams (a) undertook the guidance of humans. All teachers must seek help from God and walk in the footsteps of the Infallibles in order to guide their students. Before all else, however, it is important to understand the qualities of guides.

Humans are creatures that possess intellect, free will, desire, means for action, understanding, and the ability to choose correctly. The original guide of this creation is the Creator. Being a guide is part of His essence and He requires no guidance from others. The guidance by divine prophets and their successors followed after God's special guidance of these personages. They were taught by the Lord, earning the ability to guide His servants by His will. In conditions where a prophet or his successor is not directly available, a guide must possess knowledge and understanding of the Book of God as well as the traditions of the Prophet (s) and the Infallible Imams (i.e., the successors of the Prophet). A guide must adhere to the commandments of God and walk the straight path to become subjected to the special guidance of God. It was Imam Ali (a) who declared, 'Whoever places himself as a leader of the people should commence with educating his own self before educating others; and his teaching should be by his own conduct before teaching by the tongue. The person who teaches and instructs his own self is more entitled to esteem than he who teaches and instructs others' (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-2-letters-and-sayings>, saying 73). He has also said, 'The worth of every [person] is in [their] attainments' (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, saying 81).

It is therefore clear that the ultimate guide is God, the Creator and Director, and other guides include prophets of God and their successors. Fallible persons can only become teachers and guides when they possess the following characteristics.

1. They must have sufficient knowledge and understanding of God, His Book, and the traditions of the Prophet (s) and the Infallible Imams (a).
2. They must possess knowledge and expertise in the area they teach.
3. Teachers must practice what they know.
4. The guidance of teachers must be derived from the guidelines and directives of the Lord.
5. The guidance of teachers must lead people to the straight path.
6. Educational content must be based on human nature.

In sermon 154 of the Nahj al-Balaghah, Imam Ali (a) draws attention to three basic characteristics of guides. “The [guide] should report correctly to his people, should retain his wits and should be one of the children of the next world” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons>) Thus, these characteristics are truthfulness, reason, and tendency towards the hereafter.

In order to enable understanding of the shortcomings of a materialistic disposition, the antithesis of tendency towards the hereafter, the Imam instructs people to consider the customs of the Prophet of Islam (s). According to sermon 160, “Certainly, in the Prophet of Allah [s] was sufficient example for you and a proof concerning the vices of the world, its defects, the multitude of its disgraces and its evil” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons>).

The paragon of guidance in Islamic education, as commanded by God the Almighty, primarily is Muhammad, the holy prophet of Islam. Then, Ali ibn Abi Talib, Fateme (the daughter of the prophet of Islam) (The Holy Quran, 2008, 4, 59; 88, 21), Mary (the mother of Jesus Christ) (The Holy Quran, 2008, 66, 11, 12) and infallible Shia Imams (Gharaati, 2015) are introduced as paragons of guidance. All of these models have been trained in the school of monotheism. In the sermon of Qasi‘ah, Imam Ali (a) explains his training by the Prophet (s), demonstrating the qualities of this paragon.

### **The paragon of divine edification**

According to Islam, the didactic paragons trained on the basis of the theory of divine guidance are the prophets of God. “[The prophets] are the ones whom Allah has guided, so from their guidance take an example” (The Holy Quran, 2008, <http://www.quran.com>, 6, p. 90). This means that Prophet Muhammad (s) is a divine paragon of guidance. Specifically about the Prophet of Islam, the Quran says, “There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern” (The Holy Quran, 2008, 33, p. 21). After the Prophet (s), the pure Imams are didactic models, but Imam Ali (a) is the first.

Imam Ali (a) has a lofty status, especially in terms of human guidance and training. His didactic views are based on his complete worldview. The first sermon of the Nahj al-Balaghah is valid proof of this claim. Prophet Muhammad (s) trained Imam Ali (a) in the school of revelation. In the sermon of Qasi‘ah, Imam Ali (a) proclaimed:

I was with him when a party of the Quraysh came to him and said, “O Muhammad, you have made a big claim which none of your fore-fathers or those of your family have made. We ask you one thing ...” The Messenger of Allah said, “What do you ask for?” They said, “Ask this tree to move for us, even with its roots, and stop before you.” [The Prophet commanded and the tree obeyed.] Then I said, “There is no god but Allah! O Prophet of Allah, I am the first to believe in you and to

acknowledge that the tree did what it did just now with the command of Allah, the Sublime, in testimony to your Prophethood and to heighten your word.” Upon this all the people shouted, “Rather a sorcerer, a liar; it is wonderful sorcery, he is very adept in it. Only a man like this (pointing to me) can stand testimony to you in your affairs.”

Certainly, I belong to the group of people who care not for the reproach of anybody in matters concerning Allah. Their countenance is the countenance of the truthful and their speech is the speech of the virtuous. They are wakeful during the nights (in devotion to Allah), and over beacons (of guidance) in the day. They hold fast to the rope of the Quran and revive the traditions of Allah and of His Prophet. They do not boast nor indulge in self conceit, nor misappropriate, nor create mischief. Their hearts are in Paradise while their bodies are busy in (good) acts” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons>, sermon 192).

In the same sermon, Imam Ali (a) says the following about his training by the Prophet of Allah (s).

Certainly, you know my position of close kinship and special relationship with the Prophet of Allah—peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his descendants. When I was only a child he took charge of me. He used to press me to his chest and lay me beside him in his bed, bring his body close to mine and make me smell his fragrance. He used to chew something and then feed me with it. He found no lie in my speaking, nor weakness in any act. From the time of his weaning, Allah had put a mighty angel with him to take him along the path of high character and good behaviour through day and night, while I used to follow him like a young camel following in the footprints of its mother. Every day he would show me in the form of a banner some of his high traits and commanded me to follow it. Every year he used to go in seclusion to the hill of Hira’, where I saw him but no one else saw him. In those days Islam did not exist in any house except that of the Prophet of Allah [s] and Khadijah, while I was the third after these two. I used to see and watch the effulgence of divine revelation and message, and breathed the scent of Prophethood. When the revelation descended on the Prophet of Allah [s] I heard the moan of Satan. I said, “O Prophet of Allah, what is this moan?” and he replied, “This is Satan who has lost all hope of being worshipped. O Ali, you see all that I see and you hear all that I hear, except that you are not a Prophet, but you are a vicegerent and you are surely on (the path of) virtue” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005).

## The student

In the divine didactic model, the third element of education is the disciple or person being guided. Disciples, or students, inherently have a role in their own correct guidance and edification. Humans are naturally creatures in need, and have been created with the purpose of perfection. They need a guide and a program. Primarily, God is the gracious and compassionate guide of humans. He has revealed a program based on human nature as well as the human developmental process and has appointed prophets to guide human beings. The Prophet (s) is a blessed teacher, and revelation is a program based

on human nature. In accordance with revelation and nature, prophets guide students upon the straight path. Verse 31 of the Quranic chapter Rum is indicative of this truth.

With their perfect knowledge of the monotheistic worldview and the covenants of nature, revelation, and prophethood, Imam Ali and the other Imams (a) guide and advise humans. In sermon 1 of the *Nahj al-Balaghah*, he emphasizes these three covenants. Each has a fundamental role in the guidance of humans. Separately, they cannot end human problems. They work together to elevate humans through guidance. It is not true that reason is needless of a revelatory program or the message of divine prophets. In an atmosphere governed by the divine worldview, reason can identify truths, be self-guiding, and attain perfection. The main responsibility of the guide toward the student is to create a cognitive monotheistic atmosphere. In such an atmosphere, the causes of problems may be identified and solutions may be found.

In the words of Imam Ali (a), reason and wisdom are two basic elements in intellectual growth and accumulation of further wisdom. The more wisdom concerning the temporal world the guide exposes to human reason, the more reason grows. In this way, reason can receive further wisdom from the world around it and use this wisdom to solve its problems. Imam Ali (a) has stated, “The depth of wisdom is extracted using reason, and the depth of reason is extracted using wisdom” (Al-Tamimi Al-Amadi, 2005, Vol. 3, p. 204). Thus, there is a relationship between rational growth and development of wisdom. The guidance of the student is realized through accrual of wisdom.

In the viewpoint of Islam, reason is guided by revelation, which encompasses methods of purifying the soul and gathering wisdom, and rational guidance is achieved after purification and accumulation of wisdom. In any case, reason cannot attain guidance until it possesses accurate external data, including both material and spiritual knowledge. In order to train humans so they can solve their problems on their own, their intellects must be developed through contemplation and correct interpretation of data and information. This gives them the insight to distinguish right from wrong. In order to attain this status, individuals who can present them with reliable information about the Creator of the world and motivate them to accrue wisdom (Dashti, 1989) must guide the student. God Almighty has appointed such guides for humanity. He declares, “And We made them leaders guiding by Our command ...” (The Holy Quran, 2008, 21, p. 73). Also, “Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful” (The Holy Quran, 2008, 76, p. 3).

God has given people reason and free will, and thus they are responsible for taking the correct path. They are able to follow their carnal desires and may fail to surrender themselves to righteousness. In this case, continuation of a good life becomes problematic, and there is no choice but to ask for guidance toward the correct path. Imam Ali (a) has stated, “May Allah bless whoever

listens to a point of wisdom and retains it, when he is invited to the right path he approaches it, he follows a leader (by catching his waist band) and finds salvation” (Nahj al-Balaghah, 2005, <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balaghah-part-1-sermons>, sermon 76).

In divine guidance, the role of religion is of utmost importance. Considering the views of Mulla Sadra in this regard, Nikzad (2007) writes, “Do they not know that before reason attains guidance through the light of religion, it is weak and its field of action is small and narrow?” (Nikzad, 2007). Noble Muhammad (s) has stated, “O people! Contemplate the Quran and understand its verses.” He has also said, “The best guidance is that of prophets” (Ilam Al-Huda, 1986, Vol. 1, p. 21).

## Discussion and conclusion

Humans are divine creations that inherently require guidance. They need a guide and advisor that has already been guided. The natural dispositions of humans become productive under revelation-based education, and in this way, guidance can be achieved. Guidance is realized through the interaction between human nature, revelation, and the message of divine prophets. Guides must have great knowledge and wisdom about human nature, the revelational program, and the traditions of the prophets and their successors.

People—disciples—have the capacity necessary for attaining guidance. If humans act in accordance with their carnal desires, they will surely be misguided, and will have lives full of problems. The guide must become familiar with the beliefs of students and endeavor to erase incorrect beliefs from their minds replacing them with correct beliefs. They must base their guidance and advice on correct beliefs. The theory of guidance and education demonstrates that noble education occurs in relation with three fundamentals, namely human beings, the message of prophets of God, and revelation. Hence, the guide must carry out this responsibility with sufficient knowledge about these covenants so that correct edification can be realized. In this way, humans can attain the lofty status that is the purpose of their creation.

In Imam Ali’s (a) theory of guidance and education, the teacher plays the role of the guide, the student is the one being guided, and the commandments of God are the subjects of guidance. The teacher must have a purified soul, strong faith, and knowledge of the Book of God and of human nature. In general, all human endeavors must be harmonious with human nature, the Holy Quran, and the traditions of divine prophets and their successors. The knowledge and experience of fallible persons and those lacking divine appointment do not bring about reliable guidance for growth and attainment of the ultimate purpose worthy of humans. This is why for proper education, it is necessary for the cognitive atmosphere of the three covenants discussed by Imam Ali (a) to govern the process.



A necessity for guidance is the reasonable interaction of these three covenants. The main agent in this interaction is the guide or teacher, who must be knowledgeable about the nature and abilities of the student as well as the educational topics and the ultimate purpose of human creation. In order to realize this theory, teachers must first be trained. Interested and talented individuals must be accepted for training. Subjects related to human abilities in various stages of development as well as topics relevant to each must be identified and formulated into a curriculum. After the curriculum is evaluated and approved, it must be entered into the educational system.

In the educational theory of Imam Ali (a), three covenants are pivotal. Each must be given special regard so that together they may result in correct education and edification. Therefore, approaches that do not focus on all three elements cannot be considered valid. The correct pedagogic approach centers on teachers, students, and subjects since each has a special function in guidance and education. Although education occurs with the interaction of all three, the teacher plays the role of the initiator of the process and hence has a special status. This is why teachers require special training. The position of a teacher cannot be given to just anyone. Careful consideration must be given to their selection and training.

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1. Available at <http://www.noorlib.ir/View/fa/Book/BookView/Image/14134>.

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**Abas Ali Rostami-Nasab** is Professor of Shahid Bahonar at the University of Kerman, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Department of Educational Science. He has a PhD in philosophy of education from Tarbiat Modarres University of Iran. He has written 14 books, 60 articles, 15 research projects, has been the supervisor of about 150 theses and projects, and has managed about 20 workshops; he has been teaching in different universities for about 24 years. He has been teaching in Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman since 1995. He spent his sabbatical leave in Harvard University (via correspondence) and Oxford University.

**Oranus Tajedini** is the assistant professor and faculty member in Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman. She has a PhD in information science and knowledge management and is the top graduate. She is interested in interdisciplinary researches particularly Islamic ones. She has written 2 books, more than 18 journal articles and 23 conference articles and has been the supervisor and advisor of more than 7 theses.

**Ali Sadatmoosavi** has a PhD in information science and knowledge management and is a researcher interested in Shia studies. He has written 3 books, more than 15 journal articles and more than 17 conference articles.