

There appears to be a widespread misconception in the world today about the true meaning and aim of education. That education is to enable a student to obtain highest possible degrees and ultimately a lucrative job, seems to be a common belief of many of us these days. 'Ala'amale bi nniyyat' i.e. man's actions are determined and based on one's intentions as the saying goes, a student is bound to be influenced by his inner understanding and belief of the true meaning and aim of education and learning.

What is then the true meaning and aim of education? We are told that the word 'Education' in English is originally derived from the Latin words 'AY' and 'CATUM' which mean to bring out from within. In other words, the meaning and aim of education is to work and strive to bring out into open the innate abilities of human body and mind so as to benefit oneself and others. Every human being is divinely endowed with some abilities which need to be trained and put to work for useful purpose. They remain dormant in an ignorant and uneducated person whereas an educated one in true sense of the word is like a jeweller who recognizes and makes good use of his abilities in distinguishing what is good and what is bad. In so doing, he is able to benefit not only himself but his family and the community at large.

Education today is of paramount importance and it occupies the anxious minds of not only young boys and girls but also of the parents and leaders of communities and nations. It is incorrect to value it against any material benefit or link it with any lucrative posts. It was in the seventh century that Hazrat Ali a.s. had guided mankind on this subject by saying 'Be prepared to acquire knowledge. Do not place anything as a return (reward) against it.' In the eyes of the Imam who was described as the gate to the apostolic knowledge by the Prophet of Islam, the acquiring of knowledge and education itself is a great wealth hence no aim of material gain could be placed against it.

Islam has emphasized that there is no boundary line for acquisition of knowledge which starts from the cradle and ends to the grave. In other words the seeking of knowledge has to be constant throughout one's life-time whether by going to school, attending lectures, sermons, studying books or by observing and taking lessons from what is happening around us in this world. By limiting the aim of education and learning to attaining certificates and degrees, one runs the risk of failures in life. The acquired qualifications may at times prove worthless or even harmful. Warning mankind on such a possible situation, Hazrat Ali a.s. says " Many a learned -educated are ruined by their own ignorance".

Let the aim of education and acquisition of knowledge be as broad as possible to include acquiring of virtues, noble ideas and pleasant character. Let the study and observation be constant so as to benefit oneself and others. Let one adorn himself with highest possible degree of intellectual approach to life and concentration on the path of truth. In one of his wise sayings, Hazrat Ali a.s. is reported to have said " Truth is the best path and knowledge is the best guide".

There is a tendency in our society today to sit back and take things easy by assuming that our acquired qualifications, or wealth and big name left behind to us by our ancestors are enough to see us successful throughout our life-span. That in any inherited situation, the constant acquisition of knowledge is essential and on this, Hazrat Ali a.s. advises us in these words " You may be an offspring of anyone (any important and notable person), acquire knowledge as this will make you independent of family status".

Mankind consists of two things- body and soul. If <sup>human</sup> body needs nourishment and acquisition of knowledge for its care and upkeep, so does the human soul. True progress in life is dependent upon the development of both body and soul. Human life can be described like a man riding a horse. Unless both are sufficiently strong, the ride could result into a disastrous fall. Hence it is the acquisition of right knowledge, both secular and spiritual, that is essential for attaining true success in human life.

In one of his thought-provoking speeches to a group of Iranian teachers who had come to Qum to pay their respects, Ayatollah Khomeini described education in these words:

" Education is a man-making and man-forming enterprise, as messengers (of God) too came for the same objective. Education is the objective of all Messengers and Prophets who were appointed by God, the Mighty and Supreme. Those who are nearer to the Messengers are nearer to human station."

To a group of students from Ahwaz on visit to Qum, the Ayatollah is reported to have said:

" Someone who learns for the sake of learning and gives no significance to practice is in the words of the Quran like an ass loaded with books. There is no difference as to books which are upon the back of an ass or in the brains of a man; on the otherhand the man whose head is full of books and who lacks correct human training is harmful to the society".

" If a correct education and training be in a country, that country can maintain its independence, give shape to its economic affairs, reform its culture and reconstruct everything."

Thus the true aim and object of education is very vast and has many dimensions.