

# Humanity's Teacher:

## 21 Teaching Techniques of the Prophet

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Bismillah. Alhamdulillah. Was salatu was salamu 'ala Rasoolillah. Amma ba'd.

In sha Allah we are going to be learning about the greatest teacher humanity has ever known – RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam.

Indeed, when we look through the Qur'an and the Sunnah, Allah subhaanahu wa ta 'aala teaches us in many instances how to teach this Islam that we have learned. If someone looks deeply into the techniques that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam used, as we are going to, then he will have a better understanding of their truth and will be more successful in bringing that truth to other people.

So how does learning these teaching techniques benefit you? First, when you understand these techniques, you are better able to grasp what is being said. Now when you come across a hadith that you are already familiar with, you will be able to recognize the teaching technique being used by the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and it will help you in both your learning and teaching of the information.

Secondly, when you gain knowledge about the techniques of RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and you see how beautiful they are, it will increase your love for RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. If you notice for example, in the hadith of the man who urinated in the masjid, everybody got angry at him except the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. And in the end of the story, because of the way the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam taught him, the man raised his hands and said, "Oh Allah, forgive me and forgive Muhammad and don't forgive anyone else after this." This is how much he loved the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam for the way he taught him and in sha Allah, when you learn the techniques of RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, your love for him will also increase.

Another benefit of learning these techniques is their effect on our da'wah

efforts. Something interesting I have noticed is that so many people, including Muslims, constantly buy lottery tickets hoping to win the jackpot and never feel sad again. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:

“If one person gets guided on your hands, it is better for you than a red she-camel.”

This means that it is better for you than the dunya and everything in it. So in today’s terms, if the jackpot is three hundred million dollars, giving da’wah is your way to win it, and the odds are not one in twenty-five million; rather they are very good, in sha Allah.

If someone is sincere in his da’wah, then Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala will help them. Alhamdulillah, I had the opportunity to be able to guide one sister. She was in South Africa, where there are many Muslims, and she emailed us because she wanted information about Islam. I then phoned one of the brothers in Canada asking him to contact a South African person who grew up with us to find out if he has any relatives living in South Africa. So he did, and we found out that the brother’s aunty and uncle lived in the city. So I sent that information to the sister and told her to contact those people, who actually lived on the same road as her, and took care of the Madrasa Islamiya also located on her same road. About a month later I emailed her again and asked what happened. She replied that these people took her to the masjid, gave her books about Islam, taught her, and took care of her, and alhamdulillah, she became Muslim. Alhamdulillah! In my heart I felt like I had just won the lottery. This is how people should go forward: by saying that their reward is in doing these types of deeds, and like I said, this is your get rich quick plan.

For people who are involved in da’wah, learning the teaching techniques enables them to recognize when and how to apply these techniques. As a result, when people approach them to talk about Islam, they will be better able to convey the message of Islam to others.

Also, Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala did not send us as God police to expel people from Islam. Our duty is to bring people into Islam, not to push them away. Some people almost take it as their mission to make sure that nobody comes to the masjid except those that are exactly like themselves. In many

classes you will notice that you learn a certain topic of knowledge, but you do not learn how to take this knowledge to the people. For example, we learn what shirk is, what kufr is, and so on. So the person goes out thinking, “Yeah, I just learned that what my dad is doing is shirk.” So he says to his father, “Dad, did you know that you’re a mushrik?” and his father says, “What are you saying? What are these people teaching you? Don’t ever go back to those people.” RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam taught us this knowledge of shirk and kufr but he also taught us how to teach it to others, and that is also his commandment, sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. So, we have to apply it just like we apply the fiqh issues that we learn.

Another benefit of learning the techniques is that it may be related to your work. Someone may be teaching at a Saturday or Sunday school or even at a full time Islamic school and may have knowledge of sciences, math, or literature, but not necessarily knowledge of Islam. Some of these techniques are taught in schools of education today. But these ‘modern’ teaching techniques are actually techniques that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam taught us; they are actually techniques of the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam that you’ll find in ahadith. When a teacher knows how to correctly use these techniques, it reflects well on himself, as the parents see that their child is understanding and is changing. That in turn also reflects that the school is able to touch the children and it brings more benefit to the entire system that is striving to educate.

Furthermore, when a person learns how to pass on the message of Islam, he will be healthier. What I mean by healthier is that when someone is unsuccessful in conveying something to people, it negatively affects his health. He gets high blood pressure, gets angry, and cannot control himself because he has not learned how to pass on the information properly to others. I have seen some people who when they give da’wah, although they are very knowledgeable, in some issues they only know one daleel. So they will say the one daleel, and the other person will reply, “Well how do you know that that is a daleel?” Even though what the person is saying is a true opinion, he has no other proofs. You know what proof number two is? It is anger. He will say, “No, you have to believe what I’m saying,” and then it turns into a fight. The third daleel is more anger, the fourth daleel is a punch, the fifth daleel is a karate kick, until, like a swat team he beats the person so that he can guide him. Subhan Allah, anger is

not proof; just because a person gets angry does not mean that he has the truth. If a person actually knows the proof, it brings him calmness and he will not get frustrated because he will realize that he can help if he is just a bit smoother in his explanation.

So, how did the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam teach? I will go over 21 of his teaching techniques, sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. I will first explain the technique and then give examples of ahadith where the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam used the technique. So, although you might know the techniques I go over, you might not have ever known the proofs of where the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam used them. Accordingly, try to think of where in your life you can apply these techniques, in sha Allah.

The book that all of these techniques are based on, which in sha Allah I recommend you get, is called Ar-Rasool Al-Mu'allim (The Prophet, The Teacher) by Abu Fattah Abu Ghuddah rahimahullah. This book is in Arabic and you can find a lot of these techniques in other older books of Arabic. Some contemporary authors have also compiled this information and written their books in a way that is easier to grasp. All of these techniques are taken from the books of Sunnah and the Shuru' - the Sharh of those books of Sunnah.

Bismillah

### **Technique #1: Do Not Bore the Listener**

Hazrat Aisha radi Allahu anha said that when RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would speak, a person listening to him, sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, could count the words on his own fingers. The people could count that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said this, this, this, and this. When I studied in Madinah University, I would not say, "I'm going to memorize this hadith." Instead, I would hear the hadith once or twice, then, if someone asked me what the daleel for something is, I could immediately say the hadith because I had automatically memorized it due to its shortness, directness, and the clarity of words that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam used.

That was the way that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam spoke; when he would speak, he would not give a marathon lecture. I do not know if you have ever been to a four-hour lecture, but if I were to ask you to recount from the

beginning what the speaker was discussing, I'm sure you would not know. Afterwards, all you would remember is the pain of a four-hour lecture. There is a reason why people do marathon lectures: If the speaker says, "Okay everybody, 10-minute break, go have some water or some tea," then the audience will leave and not come back. So the speaker instead decides to just extend it another half hour, and another half hour, and another half hour, because he is afraid people will leave. What that speaker does not understand is that the people are not listening anymore and they will not understand what is being said. They are only staying out of respect for the person.

The method I use to determine if I have bored my audience is to notice how quickly they leave after I conclude. That indicates how much pain they went through in the extension of the lecture. In Sahih Al-Bukhari, Imam Bukhari has a chapter titled something to the effect of The Chapter of Being Moderate When Teaching. In this chapter he gives the hadith of how the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would not always consistently give the people a lecture. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would give a lecture occasionally, then there would be a time when he would not speak, and then there would be another lecture. As a result, every time the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam spoke, it was a special occasion.

In the story of Ibn Mas'ud radi Allahu anhu – and in the olden days the people were much stronger as students so they could go the entire day learning – Ibn Masud radi Allahu anhu used to teach on Thursday every week. The people wished that he, radi Allahu anhu, would teach every single day. He said, "I could do this, I could teach you every single day, but this is not how the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam taught us and I'm afraid that I will bore you and you will not learn."

I used to do a halaqa every two weeks and some people would tell me do it every single week and some would ask for one every single day. There were always people who wanted to do it more often and I would ask them, "Have you come every two weeks to the class?"

And they would say, "No."

I would say in reply, "Then what would make me believe that you would come

every week, if I increase the number of halaqas? In fact, you would miss more halaqas than you are missing right now.”

Furthermore, when I was doing these lectures sometimes there would be a special event occurring at the same time so people would choose to attend the special event rather than the weekly halaqa which occurs regularly. So it can be helpful to couple the weekly lecture with a special event. For example, once, I announced that the next halaqa would be titled Journey to Masjid Al-Aqsa: A PowerPoint Presentation based on photos from my travels. As a result, the halaqa that normally had five or ten people was a full masjid of about 400 people. Four hundred people, just because it was a special event and not just a boring consistent activity. I am not saying the consistent things are not important; indeed they are important, but they have to be coupled with special events every now and then.

How can you identify if the audience is bored? During a lecture these are the people who are sleeping. Even if a person is tired for some reason other than boredom, if the lecture is interesting enough, he will tell himself, “Even though I am tired, I will stay awake and listen to the lecture.” Rather than sleeping, other people who are bored will read a newspaper during the lecture. I have actually seen this happen during a khutbah, and the person was sitting right beside the imam. We can blame that person for not paying attention and for being disrespectful to the lecturer and so on, but that is not always the case. It might be that the lecturer has to change his technique so that he can hold his audience’s attention, in sha Allah, during that lecture.

Another way to determine if a person is not paying attention in a lecture is that his eyes are no longer focused on the speaker. So if you see everybody in a lecture looking around, looking for the clock, and so on, that means that they are not paying attention. The speaker has to either stop talking or do something to capture their attention after that.

## **Technique #2: Speak at the Intellectual Level of the Listener**

When an individual is speaking to someone, he should be aware of how much that person already knows. Otherwise, if he speaks at a level that the person does not understand, it will be a fitnah for that person. It could even go as far as to shake the person’s iman or push him away from Islam because he is exposed

to an argument that he cannot yet comprehend.

In Bukhari we find a chapter titled, Teaching Knowledge to Some and Not to Others for Fear of Them Misunderstanding. The hadith regarding this issue is the hadith of the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam when he told Muadh radi Allahu anhu, “Whoever says la ilaaha illAllah Muhammad ur RasulAllah sincerely from his heart will enter paradise.”

The companion radi Allahu anhu said to RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, “Shouldn’t I tell everyone?”

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “No, because they will begin to lean, they will become lazy in their deen after that.”

Later the companion radi Allahu anhu did explain the hadith, which many of you know. So, what was the problem in telling everyone in the first place? The problem was, as the ‘ulama mention, that some people would think that if they just said la ilaaha illAllah, only by their words, they would enter Jannah no matter what actions they do, even committing shirk, which is not true. On the other hand, these people do not understand that if someone is sincere to la ilaaha illAllah Muhammad ur RasulAllah then he will be the best Muslim.

Similarly, Ibn Rajab rahimahullah says that facilitations, called rukhsa in Arabic, “should not be passed on to the lay people because these people would then take them as the complete Sunnah.” For example, if there is not enough water, it is permissible to only wash the body parts one time rather than three times in wudu, but the preference, or afdal, in normal situations is to wash three times. Imagine if you taught this rukhsa to a child; you’ll see that the child forever will only be washing once, and this is not the Sunnah of rasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. That child does that because his understanding isn’t up to the level where he realizes that this is only a rukhsa and not what we should be doing regularly.

Along the same lines as speaking at the intellectual level of a person, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would also respond to people according to their unique situations. For example, in the hadith of the person that asked the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam about kissing while fasting, the Prophet

sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam gave permission to one person and did not give permission to another. When they asked about this, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said that the difference was that one person was an elder and the other was a newlywed. The elder has more control over himself compared with the newlywed. Thus, the ruling of the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam changed based on the situation of the person who was asking.

Similarly, despite all of the aayaat and ahadith speaking about encouragement of jihaad fi sabilillah, there is a hadith about a person approaching the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam wanting to go for jihaad, and the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam asked him, “Are your parents alive?” Upon hearing that they were, he sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “Go and do jihaad in the kind treatment of your parents.” So the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam looked at the situation of the person who was asking and saw that he might not be the best candidate to be doing jihaad. In his case, there was another jihaad, something more preferable in his specific case, that would be more rewarded by Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala.

In order to be able to answer a person according to his situation, the one giving advice or teaching should know who it is who is asking the question. Sometimes when someone asks me a question, the first thing I do is ask about 5 questions in reply. For example, I might ask, “What country are you from?” and some people might misunderstand why I’m asking the question. But when you understand the nationality of a person, there are also different cultures that come with that nationality, which help you to understand where that person is coming from.

Sometimes someone will ask a question regarding a simple issue in Islam, but the one giving a response may realize that because of focusing too much on the simple issue, the person is missing out on a lot of the furood and could be focusing on something more important instead. For example, if someone asked me how to give da’wah to convince someone of the importance of using miswak, I would first ask, “Does this person pray?” Upon hearing that this brother doesn’t even pray I would say, “True you should use miswak, but work on the salah and talk to this person about that.” That is the fiqh of understanding the person who is asking.

### **Technique #3: Use Questions and Debate**

In the book of Sunnah, you will find that using questions and debate is one of the most popular techniques that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam used. One way that we are used to seeing this technique used is in schools by teachers. A teacher can make a statement to a child and the child will not learn because he just has to memorize what is being said. But, when a teacher evokes the child's thinking and asks, "What do you all think about this," and good teachers know that this is the way to teach, the child learns to make conclusions on his own. If children are simply told something, then they will forget what was said. So, in a well-known hadith the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam asked his companions, "What would be the situation of someone who has a river at his door and everyday, five times a day he comes out and he takes a bath in that river? At the end of the day would he have any dirt on himself?"

They responded, "There would be no dirt on him, O RasulAllah."

Then the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, "Similarly there are the five salawat, cleansing the person in this way." So he sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam asked them the question and they were able to make a meaningful conclusion, radi Allahu anhum.

In another hadith, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam asked, "Who is the Muslim?" We know the common definition- one who has submitted to Allah subhaanahu wa ta 'aala. However, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam responded with the literal meaning of the word salim, saying, "The Muslim is the one who other people are at peace from his hands and his tongue." Then the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam asked, "Who is the muhajir?"

The people responded, "The one who emigrated from Makkah to Madinah."

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam replied, "The person who emigrates and goes away from those things that Allah subhaanahu wa ta 'aala forbade."

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam then posed another question, "Who is

the bankrupt person?” Today we would say a person who does not have money is the bankrupt person; our focus is always on money. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “It is the person who comes on the Day of Judgment with all these good deeds, but he is hit and cursed and his good deeds start being taken from him until he has no good deeds left and he goes bankrupt. Then he starts getting the bad deeds of the people he hurt and he is thrown into the Hellfire.”

So again it was a debate and the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was doing a back and forth question and answer with the people he was speaking to. I know in a lot khutbahs or when we give lectures the speaker may not do this, or a teacher in an Islamic school, or a parent to their children might not speak like this, they might not ask questions. But subhan Allah these questions are so important. I have seen books written on how to create the question so that it will provoke the thinking of the person. I will give you an example of two children. One of the children is playing with a toy and says, “My toy, my toy,” and the other child starts crying, waiting for the parents to come. What happens is that most parents would come and take the toy from the first child, who has been hogging the toy and taking it the whole time, and say, “No, you have been playing with it the whole time and its time for this other child to play with it.” So it’s ripped out of the child’s hand, given to the second child, and the first child will start crying just as loud, or louder, than the child who was crying earlier. Then when the parents are gone, what will he do? He will take his fist and knock out the child who got the toy. Then the toy gets dropped and they both get in trouble from the parents. This is how this type of situation usually gets resolved. In a book called How To Raise a Thinking Child, the author gives another scenario of what a parent could do. If the parent or the teacher goes up to that child, let’s call him Zaid, and says calmly, “Zaid, is it fair that you play with the toy all the time and Amr plays with it for no time?” Again, this is said very calmly and politely. What will the child answer? How can the child answer? He has to answer in fairness. If he says, “Yes it is fair, it is my toy,” just repeat, “Is it fair that you play with the toy the whole time and Amr does not get to play with it any of the time?” This forces the child to think about what he has done.

I know a lot of Islamic school teachers who, when a student is talking in class, will say harshly, “Why are you talking in class?” Does that teacher really care

about the answer? No, the teacher does not care about the answer. This is an incorrect approach to the situation. If you are going to ask a question, then you need to listen to the answer or even set up a list of possible solutions. Ask the child for example, “Are you talking in class because you are bored or are you talking in class because you have something to say?” It could be either of the two, so the child might say, “No, I am talking in class because I wanted to know what you were saying.” You would provoke an answer from the person and he will start thinking about what you are saying. That is the power of asking the proper questions and getting the audience thinking. Again, if you ask a question then listen to the answer and give the person a chance to respond. Otherwise, if we raise our children on rhetorical questions like “Why are you talking in class? Get out!” not allowing them to speak, then they will not learn how to properly answer questions and they will not be able to think critically. They will just think, “Oh boy, I am in trouble,” and they will not use their minds.

#### **Technique #4: Use Analogies**

The fourth technique of the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam is using analogies. When giving example of fard (obligatory) actions, I often make the analogy of cash fard and credit fard, which are terms I made up. Something that is cash fard refers to an action that you have to do immediately. Something that is credit fard is fard fid-dhimma, meaning it must be made up later and it is owed to Allah in the meantime. The example for this is if a person is traveling in Ramadan. Even in a state of traveling, it is fard for that person to fast, but it is fard fid-dhimmah; he is not eternally exempt from that fast, but rather it is owed. In other words, that fast he missed due to traveling is on debt to Allah suhaanahu wa ta ‘aala. Therefore, after Ramadan he has to make it up because it maintains its fard status. I call this a credit fard. On the other hand, cash fard is something that a person has to do right away. For example, if someone misses fajr, he thinks it is a credit fard - that he automatically gets an extra six hours to pray fajr - so he prays it at 11:58 a.m. even though he has been awake and having breakfast. He does not realize that he has to do it right away. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa Sallam said that the commandment is that a person has to pray it as soon as he wakes up or as soon as he remembers that he missed the prayer. I made this analogy in an Usool Al-Fiqh class that I taught, and I noticed that on the exam the students started using the terms cash fard and credit fard to describe various situations. I said, “No, I made up those terms.”

And they said, “I don’t remember a lot of things from class, but I do remember cash fard and credit fard.”

I use other similar analogies like football field fard, community fard, and personal fard because we think of the Arabic terms like Greek terms; we do not understand the true meaning behind the words. But an Arab person actually understands fid-dhimmah as something that is owed, while the person who does not know Arabic will just memorize it as a term without a meaning. So, because I used analogies that the students could relate to, they were able to grasp the meaning and continue to use the knowledge after the class.

An example from the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam is the hadith of the woman who came and asked him sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam about her mother who made an oath to do Hajj but then died. She asked the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, “Should I do Hajj on her behalf?”

Normally someone would just answer with a fatwa, “Yes you have to do Hajj on her behalf,” but the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:

“If your mother had any debts, would you pay them on her behalf?”

The woman replied, “Yes.”

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:

“The debt owed to Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala is more worthy of being fulfilled and paid off” (Bukhari).

I am sure many of you, when you now read this hadith, understand the seriousness of fulfilling the oath of Hajj for one’s parent who has passed away, because the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam compared it to a real financial debt that a person would have to pay off.

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would also often compare many of the ahadith to Mount Uhud. Today someone might give an example comparing something to the weight of Mount Uhud, but since many people have not seen Mount Uhud, they will not understand the analogy. But when the Prophet sal

Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would say it to someone, all that person had to do was listen to the Prophet and he would know what the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was talking about. There was no tall building, no Hilton and no Sheraton blocking the view, so they could look directly and see Mount Uhud and see just how enormous was the reward the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was talking about.

It is important to understand that analogies have to be given in the appropriate context and with the audience in mind. For example, when I was young, some person came and started giving us an example saying, “Imagine if you are boiling milk.”

And then I said, “We don’t boil milk here; they boil our milk for us.”

But obviously he had a different understanding because he was coming from a different country. He went on, “Imagine if you’re boiling milk and someone drops a droplet of urine into the milk.”

We cried in response, “Ewwwww,” and I said, “Number one, we don’t boil our milk and number two, nobody drops urine into a pot of milk.”

I knew what the person was trying to say, but no one could comprehend this analogy because this situation does not happen here. However, subhan Allah, that same situation could have been described using a similar yet slightly different analogy. The analogy is where you are at an iftar or dinner and you finish your glass of coke but there is a little bit of coke left when someone says, “You want some water?” So the person pours you water in the same glass and the water is brown and the person is like, “Oh no! I didn’t know there was coke in that cup.” This is the exact same analogy but stated in terms that the people can comprehend versus something that they cannot comprehend. This will make the difference in them understanding what you say.

### **Technique #5: Use Diagrams or Drawings**

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam taught people to use drawings on the earth, or on the dust. Once the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam made a straight line through the sand and after that he made lines to the right and lines to the left, and then he sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam mentioned verses relating

to the sabeel (way) of Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala:

“And do not follow the other paths as it will distract you and divide you from the path of Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala.”

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said the verse and the people were looking down at the drawing in the sand. So, when a teacher is explaining something, if he ever gets the chance to make a diagram of what he is talking about, the chance of the students who are visual learners remembering things will increase. If there is a lecture that is only audio, meaning the people are just listening and not interacting, then the audience will only remember about 20% of what was discussed. If visuals are introduced, your ability to remember might go up to 60%. What keeps up the ability to remember more than that is to do an activity. That little quiz at the end, some people may not think it’s important, but that will increase your retention up to 80% because you are getting involved with what you learn. And this is just an example of how the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would draw in the sand. Alhamdulillah, these things are easily available to us, whether it is a blackboard, or a dry erase board, or even just putting up a piece of paper, or even gathering the students around a notebook. The fact that they have to step out of their chair means that they are getting involved. The students will appreciate getting out of their chairs rather than sitting in their desks.

Another diagram that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam drew was a box with a line going from the middle of it to the outside of it and then he drew other lines that were cutting into that line. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said the middle represents a person and the line going out are his hopes. For example, his wish is to live for 100 years and to win a 300 million dollar lottery jackpot. That is the man’s goals beyond the box, and the box is his qadr, for example his destiny to die, and his ajl (appointed term), for example when it is written for him how long he will live. And those arrows that are coming to the person, they are different things that will happen in a person’s life. So someone may have the desire to be a great hockey player and he plays college hockey. But the first minute he goes out onto the ice, he gets slammed into the board, his spine snaps, and he is forever paralyzed. Even though he desired something, those lines came in and cut into his desires. If one of these ‘lines’ misses, then surely another one will hit the person, changing what he was

planning for.

### **Technique #6: Use Gestures While Talking**

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam used both statements and hand movements or gestures while talking. The first hadith example of this is well known, which is when the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam raised his hand saying:

“I and the one who takes care of the orphans are in paradise, like this”  
(Bukhari).

And he joined his fingers. You rarely find that someone recalls this hadith without following the Sunnah of the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam in putting his fingers like that.

Another example is when the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was giving one of the companions radi Allahu anhu advice, saying:

“Beware of this,” and he grabbed his tongue, which is very descriptive (Al-Tirmidhi).

It is not like telling someone, “Watch your tongue.” If you actually grab your tongue and hold it, you will provoke so many emotions in the person’s mind that your message will become ingrained and it will have much more of an effect on the person.

Oftentimes, the psychology of hand movements is studied and used in business for material reasons. But when it comes to teaching our kids about Islam, these books get ignored. From this field we find that if I wanted to make you comfortable, I would start imitating where your hands are. If I start imitating the way the other person is acting, then he will feel comfortable. For example, you might find a teacher who is a little bit too unlike the students and so they do not feel comfortable around him. However, another teacher, who just got out of university and is twenty-three years old with long hair and has a hobby of

skateboarding and he is teaching Islam would be the most successful da'ee because his students would feel most comfortable with him.

If someone starts imitating the way people act, he will make them comfortable, and that happens with hand movements. So, if someone is standing leaning back with his hands on his hips, then maybe I could stand leaning back with my hands on my hips. Similarly, if I don't want to scare someone when talking to him, I would stand beside him, rather than in front of him. Standing in front of someone gives off the feeling of confrontation, while standing to the side gives a feeling of working together in a problem.

### **Technique #7: Use Tangible Examples, Exhibits, or Artifacts**

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would occasionally raise something up that was haram as an exhibit to emphasize it as haram. An example of this is the hadith of gold and silk for men. You may know that gold and silk are haram for men, but what you might not know is that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam raised up actual pieces of gold and silk and said:

“These are haram for the men of my ummah and halaal for the women of my ummah” (Abu Dawud).

Any teacher knows that if you ever have the chance to bring in a three-dimensional exhibit to the class, it will always have a much more profound affect on the students than does just lecturing. For example, if you tell a child about a parrot and then you pull one out from under your desk, the kids will be amazed and will never forget that class. They will remember it because they were able to see, hear, and maybe even touch the parrot.

In another hadith, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was speaking about ghulul, which is to steal from the war booty before it has been distributed by the ameer of the army. When the battle is taking place, the ameer needs people to do different things; he needs these people to stand and guard certain areas; he needs other people to work in communications. If the soldiers or even the townspeople become preoccupied with the war booty, there is the fear of human jealousy coming in. So to take from the war spoils before the ameer divides it is haram.

When talking about ghulul, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam actually picked up the war spoils and he began explaining to the Sahaabaa radi Allahu anhum about the intensity of the haram of stealing from the war spoils. He did this holding and standing beside the war spoils after battle. So he didn't just make a reference to the war spoils; he actually held it up (Bukhari).

### **Technique #8: Answer Questions Before They are Asked**

When I am trying to explain something to a person, I often think to myself, "To this person, what might be confusing about what I am saying? What questions might this person have?" Then, I respond to these questions that I have come up with before the person asks the questions himself.

This technique works well when the teacher is able to relate to the mindset of the students. For example, take the issue of non-Muslims going to the Hellfire. Growing up in this culture, our youth are automatically made to believe that it's not a person's fault that he was born into a non-Muslim family and that everybody should go to Jannah in the end. So these aayaat that speak about Hellfire for the disbelievers do not make sense to these youth because they are indoctrinated with a certain view or mindset. This occurs frequently and, although these youth don't say it out loud, these thoughts are in their minds. However, when they are provoked it will come out. So what happens with a North American audience is that they are living with ahlul-kitab, they hear an aayah that is so strong against the disbelievers, and they think, "What about my friend Johnny at work? What about Sally and Robin? This can't possibly apply to them." So when I would prepare for a tafseer class that I taught, these subconscious refutations started popping in my head because I also grew up here. I thought to myself, "If I had not gone overseas to study Islam, I would have rejected this." However, from my learning I could say that the answer to this is that these aayaat are talking about people who are arrogant; those who have heard the message and have rejected it. Through this way of formulating the refutations myself, I could address the refutations before my students brought them up. So, if one is able to understand the culture of a people so that he can relate to the issues that come to their minds, then he is better able to address these issues before they are even asked.

An example of this is when the Prophet sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam said:

“The Shaytan will come to a person and say, ‘Who created this, who created that?’ until the Shaytan finally brings the person to the conclusion, ‘Who created Allah?’ Whoever has this happen to them should recite Surah Ikhlas and should spit three times to the left, dry spit, and say ‘a’oodhubillah he minash shaytan nirajeem.’”

Did this happen to someone and he asked the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam about it? No, this did not actually happen. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said that this may happen to someone so when it comes about, do like this. So here, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam answered a question before the situation even came about where someone asked it.

### **Technique #9: Answer With More Than What is Asked**

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would answer with more than what he was asked by paying attention to the questioner’s situation and trying to recognize how this person could benefit even more. An example is the hadith, one of the first from the Book of Tahara, about the people who came to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and asked him sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam about making wudu from sea water. Because they couldn’t drink the sea water, they were also thinking that it was not tahir. They asked about a situation where they have drinking water, but if it is used for wudu, then there would be none left to drink when they are thirsty. So the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said the famous hadith:

“The water is tahoor.”

So one can make wudu with sea water, but then the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam also began talking about seafood, that the animals that die from the water are halaal to eat. Did the person ask about dead fish or fish that are not slaughtered from the water? No, these questions were not asked. But the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam responded more than he was asked because he knew that this person, just like he had an issue with making wudu, he would similarly later on have an issue with the fish. So the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam answered the questions plus what would benefit the person even more. It is said that this is a key characteristic of a successful teacher because people do not always ask the questions that are most important to them. So the teacher has to realize that, “Yes, they’re asking about this, but

this other issue is more important and will also benefit them.”

An interesting thing with regard to Muslim youth, or any time a person is talking to someone else, is that they already have in mind what they want to learn. I'll give you an example: if someone came into a tafseer class and he wanted to learn asbab-un-nazool (the reasons for revelation), and then the teacher said, “We are not going to learn the reasons for revelation because you don't know the Arabic in the first place, so let's learn the Arabic words.” This is important, but at the end of the class the student will feel like he did not get what he came for and he'll feel like he is missing something. A technique used in some of my classes is that right in the middle of the lecture, I ask the students to take a piece of paper and write on it what benefit they want to get from the class. So the student now has the opportunity to communicate exactly what he is seeking to learn and I might find that a couple of people are saying the same thing. Although what I am teaching may be more important, I can now at least try to incorporate some of the students' wishes so that they feel fulfilled at the end of the class. That is the practice of good teachers – to recognize what is beneficial to the students while also answering what they want to know and then moving them on to more beneficial things.

Often at conferences or retreats there is an open question and answer session where for example, from Maghrib to Isha the shaykh will say nothing; all he will do is answer questions. But after Maghrib after everybody has had donuts so when the shaykh asks, “Are there any questions?” nobody raises his hand. Is it possible that nobody has any questions; they know everything about Islam? No, that is not true, everybody has questions. So what should a person do if he is the teacher and he is expecting questions? He should think of interesting questions that the students should be asking so that if the students do not come with questions, he could say for example, “If you don't have any questions, I'm sure many of you are confused about the halaal meat issue. Allow me to explain...” So the teacher is already putting questions into the students' minds.

Another example of providing more than what is asked is the hadith of the woman who asked the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam about Hajj for her infant.

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam asked, “Who are you all?”

They said, “We are so and so. Who are you?”

He said, “I am RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam.”

When he said that, the woman raised her baby and said, “Is there Hajj for this baby?”

The answer is yes, and that was the end to her question. But the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “And you will have the reward.” Meaning that you will be rewarded for the effort that you put into taking this infant for Hajj. In fact, that addition is something that everybody focuses on when they are taking their children for Hajj because they are always seeking the reward from Allah subhaanahu wa ta ‘aala. They’ll say I’m taking two children for Hajj because I want three times the reward. The woman did not ask about this additional information but the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam replied with more than she asked because the issue would later come up.

### **Technique #10: Turn the Question into Something That Will Be of More Benefit**

An example of this is the hadith where a person came to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and asked, “When is the hour?” The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam disliked this question because it was one of the techniques that the mushrikeen used against the him sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. Oftentimes when he spoke about the hereafter, Jannah and Nar, the repayment, the recompense, yowm-ad-deen, they would say to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, “When is the hour?” They said this to make him look bad in front of the other people and to hurt the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. We see aayaat in the Qur’an, especially in juz amma describing how people came asking the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam this question. But once a Muslim came, not a companion, but a Bedouin who did not know this situation and he asked the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, “When is the hour?” The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam did not say, “Don’t you know you’re not supposed to ask that question?” But he sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “What have you prepared for that final hour?” Meaning, it is surely going to come, it does not matter exactly when, but it will come. The more important question is, “What have you prepared for it?”

The questioner said, “I haven’t prepared a lot of salah and I haven’t prepared a lot of zakah (in addition to the fard), but I am preparing one thing – my love for Allah and His messenger.”

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “You will be with who you love.”

The companions, radi Allahu anhum, and Anas radi Allahu anhu said that there was no hadith more beloved to him than this hadith. So, it went from a question that did not have any benefit, to the most beloved hadith of the companions, radi Allahu anhum.

Another example of this is the hadith where the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was asked, “What should the muhrim (someone in ihram) wear?” Imagine if the question was answered directly: “The muhrim should wear two white towels made in China.” What if someone has a piece of cloth made in India; would it be haram to wear it? No, it would not. So instead of defining what exactly the muhrim should wear, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam answered the question by enumerating what the muhrim should not wear. This way, the type of clothing is restricted, so if someone wants to wear some innovative new product, he will have to look at this hadith and see if it is included in this hadith or not. This shows the hikmah of the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and should increase your love for him sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam.

### **Technique #11: Allow Others to Answer the Questions**

An issue would come up and the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would occasionally have the question answered by one of the companions in order to train them to answer the questions. For example, there is the hadith of Abu Bakr radi Allahu anhu, which is authentic, that a man came to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and said that he had a dream that there were clouds dripping honey and ghee and there was a rope that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam had climbed up. Then the people had come and one person climbed up the rope, and some people were collecting many of the droplets that were coming down from the clouds while others were not collecting that much. Before the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam answered with an interpretation

of the dream, Abu Bakr radi Allahu anhu said, “Ya RasulAllah! Allow me to interpret it,” and the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam allowed him to do so.

So we see in this hadith that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam allowed Abu Bakr radi Allahu anhu to answer the question and then he sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam told him that he was correct on some points and mistaken on others.

There are other cases where a person would come to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam with a legal issue and he would tell a certain companion to get up and make a judgment between them. That companion would say, “Ya RasulAllah, shall I judge between them while you are here, in our midst?”

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would respond in the affirmative. These are the companions who later became Muslim judges, and they were the ameurs that went out to Yemen, Egypt, and other places. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam had trained them in his midst and then they went on later to become the qudaa’ (judges).

This technique of having the students answer questions is considered a modern teaching technique. So, if a student asks his teacher, “What is an alligator?” instead of the teacher answering the questions, if he is smart and wants to get the meaning of the word across to the students, he will say, “Students, Suhaib is asking what an alligator is. Does anybody know?” By allowing the children to answer the question, they are being involved in the answer and are more likely to retain the answer. Sometimes they may say some things that are wrong, but the teacher will be able to correct them. They consider this a modern technique, but it was a technique of the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam that he often applied.

### **Technique #12: Take Advantage of ‘Teaching Moments’**

An example of this technique, which commonly occurs amongst the people, is Hajj lectures that occur near Hajj time. If I announced that I was doing a seminar about Hajj (at a time not near Hajj season), not many people would attend. But even at Hajj time when I tell people that we’re going to be answering questions on a certain night the people still will not come. Then at

the end of Hajj someone will say, “Ya Shaykh, this happened at the Jamaraat,” and I tell him, “Okay, you have to pay a penalty; go slaughter a sheep,” and I think to myself, “Remember the lecture you missed?” But this shows that people prefer to ask questions when they are actually in the moment. And it’s in the moment that you’ll have the attention of the people. Another example from Hajj is the day of ‘Arafaah. Try to explain the importance of this day outside of the moment and the people will not pay attention. But at Hajj on ‘Arafaah day when someone is explaining to the people what the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam did on this day and the background of the day of ‘Arafaah, you will have all the attention of the people and they will listen. And that’s the hikmah of the da’ee – to recognize when an opportunity to teach the students comes up.

Teachers call this a ‘teaching moment’. It’s when an interesting question comes up from a student, and though it may be off topic it will be of benefit to the whole class. The teacher might have the curriculum in front of him, but because of this moment and the question the child brought up, the students are all paying attention to this issue so the teacher should take advantage of the teaching moment and answer that ‘off topic’ question.

Suppose, two children get into a very large fight at recess time, so much so that one of them swears at the other and the other one retaliates by throwing a rock at the child and so that child has to be taken to the hospital. This doesn’t happen every day (and if it does you have a problem in your school), but the teacher can seize the moment and gather the children and open to the aayaat in Surah Al-Hujurat about how a believer treats his Muslim brother.

Another example is the hadith of the road kill. There was, I believe, a dead goat with a deformity in its ear and the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam passed by it. Others were passing by, and no one was paying attention to the dead animal, yet the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “Look at this. Which one of you would buy this for such and such amount of money?”

They said, “Ya RasulAllah, even if it were alive, no one would want to pay money for it. Because of its deformity, no one would care for it, and how much more so since it’s dead.” In other words, it’s road kill and nobody cares about it.

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “Verily, the dunya is more worthless to Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala than this animal is to you. Just like you don’t care about this, in the sight of Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala, this dunya is less worthy than this.”

So this was an occasion where there happened to be this dead animal people were passing by and the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam took it as a moment to teach us what the dunya should mean in our lives.

The next example is the hadith of the woman throwing her child into the fire. This woman had lost her child, who was still nursing, for a long period of time. The child was away from his mother for so long that he could have died. So when the mother finally found the child, she grabbed it and immediately started feeding him. The companions were looking and were amazed at the immense love of this mother. At that moment, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “Do you imagine that this woman would throw this child into the fire and burn it alive?”

They said, “Ya RasulAllah, she would never do it so long as she is capable of protecting the child from that.”

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam then said, “Indeed, Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala is more merciful to His slaves than this woman to her child.”

### **Technique #13: Use Playful Fun**

Out of all the techniques this one is the most foreign to our communities. Take the science of smiling. If I had a big smile on my face and I said to you, “I hate you all,” what would your reaction be? You cannot hate someone who is smiling at you. Even if their words contradict what they are saying, you have to love them. But if I changed the tone of my voice then I could make you cry, or even hate me in return.

When people give da’wah they may think that from their taqwah to Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala they must frown at everyone. Meaning that they feel they are being rewarded by Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala for showing hatred. I asked some of the ‘ulama regarding this and was told of a very evil man who came to the home of the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. The Prophet sal

Allaahu alayhi wa sallam told 'Aisha radi Allahu anha about how evil this person was yet when that man came into his home, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam smiled at him. This intrigued 'Aisha radi Allahu anha so much so that when the man left, she asked the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and he said:

“Verily, we smile in the faces of some people and our hearts curse them.”

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam had the greatest character, sal Allahu alayhi was sallam, by playing and joking with children. There were even some situations where the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would spray water in the face of the children. Some adults would never do anything like that. But imagine the kid who the Prophet sprayed water in his face. Would that kid ever not love the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam after that?

Now on the other side of this playful fun is that some people go to the extreme of hysterical laughter and rolling on the floor in amusement. There shouldn't be exaggerated laughter, and we shouldn't always be laughing or joking. Rather, we should be moderate. Sure we smile, but there are times when we should be serious.

Sometimes there will be teachers who always teach through jokes. So when they try to say something serious, people start laughing. They'll say, “I'm serious about this, no, don't laugh,” and the people are thinking, “Oh we're not supposed to laugh,” because they just think that everything is a joke. Everything is not a joke. Actually, this excessive laughter and joking causes the heart to harden because excessive laughter distracts the heart from the remembrance of Allah subhaanahu wa ta'aala. Similarly, among all of these techniques there is not one that is the best and should be done all the time. Rather, they should be done in moderation.

### **Technique #14: Using Oaths for Emphasis**

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would emphasize something by swearing by Allah 'azza wa jall. This occurs in many ahadith that you hear very often, and now in sha Allah when you go back to those ahadith, you will be able to grasp the full intensity of what was said.

If you go through Juz ‘Amma, most of the surahs have aksam (oaths) in them. For example, Surah Ash-Shams, was shamsee wa-duhaahaa; Surah Al-Lail, wal layli ee-dha yagh-shaa, and Surah ad-Dhuha, wad duhaa, just to name a few. You see that all of them start with a qasm (oath).

If I say to you, “I swear by Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala,” and then I just move on to the next point, what would you do? Someone would raise their hand and ask me why I am swearing by Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala and hence the oath caused the listener to pay more attention. Similarly, when you are reading Qur’an and you hear a qasm from Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala, pay attention to what Allah subhaanahu wa ta’aala is testifying to.

### **Technique #15: Repeat, Repeat, Repeat**

During the Prophet’s, sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam, time people didn’t have notes or sometimes they would write notes in. Yet, a lot of people would memorize things that were being said. So you see someone like Imam Bukhari Rahimahullah, sitting in a class and the people would ask him, “Why aren’t you taking notes?” Then he would say back all the ahadith. He had memorized them just from hearing them one time. But those are the exceptional people, obviously they didn’t have TV, and their intelligence and their strength at memorization increased because of this.

If there was something that needed emphasis, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, would repeat it three times.

The statement of Anas radi Allahu anhu regarding this is that he said the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would repeat something three times so that people would understand what he was saying, sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam. An example of this is the hadith where the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:

“Beware and destroyed from the ankles of the Hellfire.”

There are a couple of techniques involved in this. The companions had stopped for Salat-ul-Fajr, and the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was coming behind them. When he neared them he saw that because of the coldness of the night, they were not fully cleaning their feet and getting the water onto their

ankles when making wudu. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam came near to them, raised his voice, and said:

“Beware and destroyed from the ankles of the Hellfire. Beware and destroyed from the ankles of the Hellfire. Beware and destroyed from the ankles of the Hellfire.”

Just imagine how you would feel if you were not making wudu properly and you heard these words. I know a lot of times when a person is repeating a hadith they might say, “And he said it three times.” But it doesn’t have the same effect as actually saying it three times so the person can get the feel for how the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said it three times.

### **Technique #16: Calling Out to the Listener and Remaining Silent**

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would call the listener by his name, causing him to pay attention, without answering or telling the listener why he is calling him. For example, the hadith of Muadh where he is traveling with the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and he sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said, “Ya Muadh,” and Muadh radi Allahu anhu said, “Labbayk ya rasulAllah wa sa’dayk” (I am consistently here for you and constant in your assistance), and then the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam remained quiet. They traveled on and then the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam again said, “Ya Muadh,” and then Muadh responded, “Labbayk ya rasulAllah wa sa’dayk,” and then he, sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam, remained quiet. A little time passed and for a third time the Prophet sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam said, “Ya Muadh,” and Muadh said “Labbayk ya rasulAllah wa sadayk.” Could you imagine Muadh radi Allahu anhu not paying attention after that? This would completely grasp a person’s attention.

When someone's giving a speech, the pauses are almost as important as are his words. Sometimes a speaker will say some amazing points and then move on to the next point without giving people time to mentally digest what was said. Subhan Allah, if a person knows when to put in those pauses between important points and just remain silent, there will be attention paid to what he is saying. I apologize for this really bad example from the Batman and Robin cartoon. One of Batman’s arch nemeses is the joker. He likes to talk a lot, but you never remember what he says. On the other hand, Batman is always staring at people

in the dark and then right at the end of the cartoon he says, “Why did you kill him?” or something like that and everyone is shocked. I was listening to an interview with the people that make the Batman cartoon and they said that they do this on purpose. Their reasoning is that when Batman speaks they want everybody to pay attention so they make sure that he remains quiet and thoughtful in his pauses all throughout the cartoon so that when he does speak he naturally causes the people to pay attention to what he says. So no one is listening to the person who speaks a lot and does not pause. Rather, he just goes on and on. When a person speaks directly to the point and is thoughtful with pauses, then people will hear those words.

### **Technique # 17: Making Physical Contact When Speaking**

The Prophet peace be upon him would hold the hand or the shoulder of the person to whom he was speaking, to make the person pay attention. The hadith that you may know very well is the hadith where the Prophet peace be upon him told the companion:

“Be in this dunya as if you are a stranger or a passer by.”

The Prophet peace be upon him was holding the shoulders of the companion when he said this. Imagine not only the Prophet peace be upon him speaking, but the touch, which is kinesthetic, and the feelings that some people might get from this contact – they will learn from the feeling. The fact that they are being touched will add an additional element of attention given to the speaker.

In teaching, certain touches can be very useful and in fact this is a technique that many teachers fail to use successfully, but it is a very important one. Take the example from the hadith where the boy came and asked permission of the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam to commit zina. Not only did he already know that this is haram, but the boy was asking divine permission to do it. Imagine how angry the companions would be. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam explained to him with questions, not answers. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam explained it so that the boy came to the conclusions himself and at the end of the dialogue the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam touched the boy’s chest placing his hand near the boy’s heart and made du’aa for him. How many teachers do that; actually put their hand on the child and make du’a for him after explaining something to a child who’s maybe in

detention or did something wrong?

I used two techniques when I used to teach young grades from kindergarten to eighth grade. I would use either technique depending on the mood I wanted to create with the child. Some of the children would get in a very arrogant position and so to enforce my authority, I would stand up very close to them in a very aggressive stance and look down at them so that they would know who the boss is. In the second style, I would bend down to a level lower than the child so that I was looking up at him and I would put my hand on the child's chest and start speaking to him. My hand would be touching the child's body and I found that the child starts to change; he'll start getting a little tense and then the emotions and bond changes. When a person does this successfully, he can get closer to people.

From among the non-Muslims we have this example of a parent who was having a lot of trouble with his child, who was constantly getting into fights and other trouble. Then one day the father said, "I love you," and he grabbed the boy and hugged him. The boy started crying and said, "Dad, you haven't hugged me in the last six years; you've never touched me." That's the type of power that a touch has.

### **Technique # 18: Using Cliff-hangers**

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would say something and the listeners would not entirely understand what was said. Then he sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would pause and give them a chance to think about it, thus increasing their desire to learn it and listen to his explanation. Newspapers and TV stations do this all the time. For example they will say, "The verdict of the O.J. Simpson case. Tonight at 11..." and you think, "What happened in the O.J. Simpson case?" They say it in such a way that you have to watch it, the person has to know – it's a cliff-hanger.

The worst thing you could do is to use a cliff-hanger and then not answer it. This would provoke the anger of the people. An example of how to effectively use a cliff-hanger is if a teacher has some interesting news to share with his class. Instead of saying, "Guess what class, I have some interesting news..." and just telling the news right there, he should instead say, "In sha Allah if you are good in class, then at the end of class today I have some good news that I

am going to tell you.” Now if you leave the class without telling the children the new, believe me, they will run in the hallways after you and tell you that you didn’t tell them the good news. But tell them the good news at the end of class and even if it’s something very simple they will still consider it to be something very great because of the way it was presented.

### **Technique # 19: Using Stories and Accounts from the Past**

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam taught people using the stories and the accounts of people who came before. This is a commonly used technique that you see throughout the Qur’an and the Sunnah – that there will be stories from people of the past and lessons are taught through these stories. There are many ahadith, which may be statements that are not well known amongst our communities. On the other hand, there are other ahadith that have stories in them and so they are well known even to the lay people. This shows you the power of those stories and why they are so easily passed on from generation to generation.

When I give a khutbah I might start it off with a story because this is a technique to provoke the hearing of the people; when the aayah comes after the story, the people will hear the aayah. What sometimes happens if a speaker opens with an aayah is that the people just disregard the aayah, even though it may be the topic of the khutbah, and they’re just waiting for the explanation. But the beautiful thing about stories and about teaching with stories is that you have the attention of the person from the beginning to the end of the story. There’s no way you will lose their attention because everyone wants to know what happens at the end of the story. No one will doze off at the conclusion of the story; they have to see what happens at the end.

Some people take this to the extreme and they only use stories and nothing else and that’s not necessarily the best way to teach. There has to be a mix of the techniques because if you only use one technique you could bore the people. So remember that telling stories is a technique, but it is not the only technique.

### **Technique #20: Paying Attention to Focus Groups**

The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would pay specific attention to women’s education by admonishing them and giving them advice. Not only

this, but the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would also pay special attention to the children, such as what we saw with Abu Umair previously. You will also find that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would go into the souk speaking to business people, the people dealing with dates and so on. The Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would pay special attention to focus groups, which is a term you might know. This refers to people that are focused on one thing, for example if there is a conference for Muslims who deal in business. Not every conference has to be general for everybody. There can be focus and attention given to the special needs of those people in a particular focus group.

In the Eid Khutbah, the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would give the khutbah and then go in front of the women and give a speech directly to them and for them. You will see in the hadith that the words come in the feminine – he’s speaking directly to them – and if you look at what the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam spoke about, one of the things was to give sadaqah. The men would overcome the women in speaking to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and so the women mentioned this to the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam and he sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam gave a special day to them so that he could teach them and they could freely ask their questions.

If nobody raises their hand to ask a question, does that mean that there are no questions? No, it doesn’t mean that. It means that people are shy to ask in front of so many people. So what the speaker should do is change the situation so that people can feel comfortable about asking the question, just as the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam made a way for the women. Allahu ta’aala ‘alim.

### **Technique #21: Using Anger**

An example from the Prophet sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam about using anger to teach or make a point is when the people tried to do shifaa’ for a woman who had stolen and have her excused from the penalty. The Prophet used anger in that moment to make the point that she cannot be excused.

So there are times where people learn through anger, but it only works when you don’t use it too often. If you use it too often people will say, “Isn’t he ever going to smile?” In my classroom when I teach Islamic studies I never shout. The students know that if I am angry I will lower my voice and if I am really

angry, I will whisper in their ear and they know they are in big trouble then. I save shouting for extreme situations where a child is going to get harmed very badly. For example, if a child is lifting up a chair to smash it on another child's head, I will shout and the children will freeze because they will be shocked since they've never heard me shout. On the other hand, the children will not respond to a teacher who shouts all the time, even in a harmful situation, because the children are used to the shouting.

May Allah 'azza wa jall continue to give you barakah in your activities and work.