

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



July 16, 2016

The Roles and Responsibilities of a Teacher

Teacher is taken for an initiator, a moralist, a mentor and guide. He is regarded as an architect of society. Society has high hopes on the teacher, and expects him to be a paradigm of knowledge and morality. The teacher is expected to work very hard to discharge the onerous duties assigned to him despite the fact that with limited resources he is to survive amidst plenty, affluence attendant upon corruption and other social vices. Society has built high expectations of the teacher, who does not come up to their standard. Society is not satisfied with the role of the teacher and holds him responsible for the deterioration in educational standards. The teacher, on the other hand, complains that he is not treated well in society. It would be better if the issue is examined in its pros and cons to arrive at an objective assessment. The issue involves the teacher's rights and responsibilities. As for the rights, these relate to salary accommodation and health, other incentives and teacher's place in society. Rights could include many more functions but for the elements of rights discussed above may be regarded as the core of the problem.

It is a fact that the teacher does not have a rightful place in society. Seldom teachers are invited to government functions, while the other members of society grace official functions as 'respected' citizens. Ignoring of teachers indicate that they are not important members of society. Where money and power are the yardstick of an individual's respectability, there the teacher cannot have any place of recognition.

Externalities play a role in influencing the conduct of an individual. Howsoever an individual may be strong inwardly, externalities would wield some amount of influence on him. Where hollowiness, cheapness are the order, there even the best of teachers really find it rather difficult to uphold the highest traditions of learning. In the midst of competition and other social vices, there are some teachers who are devotedly given to the pursuit of knowledge. In a city of madness and corruption it requires a great moral courage to fight against morally eroding forces. The inner strength of a teacher is the real strength.

As far the responsibilities, teachers are required to teach with dedication. The profile of teachers on this account is low. Particularly at the college level, teachers of physical sciences are more interested in private tuition work than in classroom teaching. There is no harm if teachers do tuition work but it should not be done at the cost of classroom teaching. True, the size of classes is large and it may not be possible for teachers to pay individual attention. But if the lecture is delivered in an interesting manner by clearing the basic concepts and issues, students can gain a lot.

As a measure of necessity students have to engage the service of professional teachers to gain proficiency in the subjects. This can be justified from economic point of view. It is a question of supply and demand; as in a market economy if there is a demand for teachers with a good reputation in the subjects, students would be attracted towards them. Market economy promotes cut-throat competition and in the process if throats of poor students are cut, nobody is moved. It is like a poor patient drawing close to his end as he cannot afford to pay the consultation fee of a physician and bear the cost of medicines. Market economy breeds human callousness. The inhuman tendencies it develops is detestable, as it make experts succumb to too much love for money. Tuition work is to be viewed in this context.

Another responsibility of a teacher is to promote his professional growth. He is supposed to be in touch with the latest trends in his academic discipline. A large majority of teachers do not bother to update their knowledge, by studying latest books and journal. Teachers, particularly at the college level, are found negligent in this regard. When a teacher falls a prey to stagnation, he has nothing to inspire his pupils and teachers, at all costs, must promote their professional development. It is a great responsibility that devolves on teachers. If they do not discharge it properly, society has every right to censure them. Bureaucrats who are mostly slaves of expediencies, are not found wanting in equipping themselves with general knowledge.

While constituting a balance sheet of teacher's rights and responsibilities, minus sign appears on both sides. It requires the highest political will on the part of the government to set things right. If it seriously wishes, it can create a balance between rights and responsibilities of teachers by removing disparity in the service structure, creating necessary incentives, and recognising the status of a teacher as an important member of society.



Traditions Gain the Upper Hand over Law

By Hujjatullah Zia

In a tradition-bound society, breaking social norms or moral standards will trigger public emotions and prompt the locals to show violent reaction without considering the state law. The traditional customs hold sway to the extent that will outweigh state and divine laws. Violating the accepted norms will spark a burning sentiment which may lead to major conflicts. One will not be able to exercise the freedoms of thoughts and expressions. The locals' dogmatic beliefs decrease religious tolerance to the lowest level. I will not challenge the faith and beliefs of a traditional community but mostly their practices have no legal bases.

To consider the tragic death of Farkhunda - a 27-year-old woman who was lynched by angry mob near the Shah-e Doh Shamshira shrine and mosque in Kabul on the Eve of solar year of 1394 - who was accused of burning the Holy Quran and, subsequently, killed by the locals without referring to state or divine laws. Similarly, the desert courts which are conducted in tribal belts every once in a while and violence against women and killing them in case of eloping with the men of their choices, which are mostly rife in villages where traditional customs are highly prominent, demonstrate the practices of the traditionalists who claim to be religious.

According to Afghanistan's Constitution - which is based on Islamic values as stated in article 3, "No law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan" - the locals do not have the right to prosecute or punish the accused or criminals. Moreover, article 25 of the Constitution and article 4 of penal code say, "Innocence is the original state. The accused shall be innocent until proven guilty by the order of an authoritative court." Therefore, since accusing one of crime and punishing him/her is a flagrant violation of law, it will be followed by legal prosecution so that the violators do not be let break the law with impunity.

The rights of accused/suspects are very critical in our judicial system and his/her freedoms are not to be curtailed unless there are some documents which suggest their crime. Moreover, the accused/suspects have the rights to access to attorney so as to protect his/her rights on the legal basis. If an accused, who is proved innocent, sustains harm or loss, the state will have to reciprocate.

Additionally, one's human dignity, be it criminal or innocent, is never supposed to be violated as the country's Constitution states in article 24, "...Liberty and human dignity are inviolable. The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity." So, "human dignity" is held in great respect in state

and divine law and no one, including the state, can disrespect one's dignity regardless of his/her personality.

It is worth saying that societal norms or moral values, which have gained the upper hand over the law in some villages, have no legal sanctions. Therefore, when one breaks the social norms, he will not be prosecuted since it is not a crime. For instance, when a girl elopes with a man of her choice, she has not committed a crime but broken a societal norm. Hence, she does not deserve to be punished. In a nutshell, punishing or killing her on the grounds of breaking a moral taboo is a major crime in both state and divine laws. So, a surge of public sentiments in a traditional community, which mostly stems from violation of the embedded values, cannot justify violating state or divine law.

Since traditions, which are handed down from one generation to the next, are deeply embedded in a society's values, only subtle changes will be acceptable. In another item, an iconoclast who seeks a sudden change with good intention, though, will be turned down by the public. Our history shows the same fact. For instance, in 1919 after the 3rd Anglo-Afghan war, Amanullah Khan, who was a pioneer and modernist king, claimed the independence of Afghanistan. Soon after acquiring Afghanistan's independence, he introduced a strong wave of modernization and intended to change a traditional society into a modern one overnight. When he made a trip to Europe, he was influenced greatly by their culture and modernity. He had returned in 1928 and brought with him many Western ideas, including social and cultural changes. Subsequently, he faced a backlash from the public and his plan was proved abortive.

I will not say that we should change our traditions but we have to fight the wrong traditional customs which are in conflict with state and religious laws. We should place a higher priority on law rather than traditions. Our cultural values and moral standards should marry with religious tenets instead of dogmatic beliefs and superstitions. To minimize these challenges, we will have to analyze and look at the issue from the lens of law and religion.

The clergy are responsible to preach and illustrate the man's human rights and dignity on the basis of religion. They are supposed to campaign against wrong traditions and reform them on the strength of Islamic tenets in our society. Thus, law and order should no more be the casualty of radical traditions which have no legal bases. The government also has to enforce the law to protect the rights and dignity of the citizens.

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Mission: Save the Environment

By Sean B. Carroll

Picture this. It is 1966. You are standing in a government office in Washington, DC, watching a uniformed official tell a man in business attire, "Your mission is to eradicate an enemy that has killed more people than both world wars combined. You will have a paltry budget, a small team, and should you fail, the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions."

It sounds like a scene from a Hollywood movie. And, indeed, it mirrors the opening scenes of the Mission: Impossible television series that premiered that year. But it really happened, if not in precisely those words. The official was Assistant Surgeon General James Watt; the man with the mission was Communicable Disease Center (CDC) scientist Donald Henderson; and the enemy was smallpox.

The mission certainly seemed impossible. At the time, smallpox was killing as many as two million people, and infecting another 15 million, each year. Yet, like in the series, Henderson and his team at the World Health Organization defied expectations. In just over a decade, smallpox became the first - and, so far, the only - infectious human disease ever to be fully eradicated.

The key to this tremendous medical achievement was not, as one might expect, some major health breakthrough (the smallpox vaccine had been around since the eighteenth century). It was diplomacy, flexibility, and cooperation.

From the beginning, the WHO lacked faith in a vaccination campaign. Many, including the WHO director-general, believed that, to stop smallpox, all 1.1 billion people in the 31 affected countries, including those in remote villages, would have to be inoculated - a logistical nightmare.

That is why WHO delegates debated for days before agreeing, by the slimmest margin ever, to provide a measly \$2.4 million per year for the effort - too little to cover the costs of whatever vaccine was not donated, let alone fund the necessary logistical support. Many donors shared this pessimism, believing that their money would be better spent on, say, health-care infrastructure. Even UNICEF decided against contributing to the campaign.

In fact, the decision to assign Henderson to the unenviable job of spearheading the campaign stemmed from the WHO director-general's decision to put an American in charge, so that the United States, not the WHO, would take the blame for the program's failure. (Henderson tried to refuse the role, but there was no "should you choose to accept it" in this episode.) Yet Henderson managed to turn a bad hand into a winning one, with a key insight.

Henderson recognized that the Soviet Union - which had been pressing for an eradication campaign for several years, and had already pledged to donate 25 million doses of vaccine annually - would not be enthusiastic about an American leading the charge. So he reached out to the Soviet deputy health minister, Dimitri Venediktov, with whom he established a rapport that enabled the two sides to work together on strategy and logistics, in addition to

their vaccine donations (the US had agreed to provide 50 million doses each year). The two most unlikely allies ended up leading the fight together.

Henderson's knack for diplomacy was matched by an eye for talent and leadership. He insisted that all of his staff spend at least a third of their time in the field, working with local officials and visiting villages, so that they could see firsthand the challenges of mass vaccination.

Among those personnel was William Foege, a Lutheran missionary doctor working as a consultant for the CDC in Nigeria. One day in December 1966, Foege got word of a smallpox case in another village and immediately traveled there to vaccinate the victim's family and other villagers.

But Foege was worried that a wider outbreak might be unfolding, and he did not have enough doses to vaccinate everyone in the area. So he adopted a different tactic: he sent runners into all villages within 30 miles to check for more cases, and then vaccinated people only in the four places where cases turned up. This created a "ring" of vaccination around infected people that broke the chain of infection.

Foege's strategy was extended to eastern Nigeria, then introduced to other parts of West Africa, and ultimately applied to the most challenging environment of all: India, with its half-billion people. It took 130,000 trained health workers 20 exhausting months, but they eliminated the scourge of smallpox that had tormented India for millennia. Then, in spite of natural disasters, the kidnapping of WHO personnel, and civil war, health workers repeated that success in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Finally, in 1980, the world was officially free of smallpox.

Fifty years after the launch of this daring mission, the tremendous achievement that emerged from it is fading from memory. But the lessons it carries for galvanizing a fractious international community to tackle a shared challenge could not be more important, especially at a time when urgent problems like environmental degradation demand global solutions.

As Foege has pointed out, the eradication of smallpox proves that "global efforts are possible." We do not "have to live in a world of plagues, disastrous governments, conflict, and uncontrolled health risks." Instead, "the coordinated action of a group of dedicated people" can "bring about a better future."

Humanity cannot live in a world of polluted air and water, empty seas, vanishing wildlife, and denuded lands. The ecological challenges we now face are matters of public health and welfare, just as smallpox was. Our mission, whether we want to accept it or not, is to summon the collective will to halt our self-destruction. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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