

## Educational and Ethical Views of Attar Neishabouri

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### Abstract

Attar believes that some health standards and different hygienic methods should be taught to children. Although teaching the methods of healthcare and well-being is among the necessities of life, child's understanding and intelligence should not be ignored. There is no doubt that religious give great importance to health issues and even emphasize that they should be taught to children. Dealing with appearance causes that their truth-seeking spirit is misled. Accordingly, Sufism recommends people to abandon appearance and deal with the interior. In the stages of growth, child's mental images are related to sensory issues. He gradually understands lighting, heating and other things that are exposed to his senses and realizes their differences. Formation of mental images and attention to their differences are related to the growth and complexity of the child's nerves and experience. Affection and kindness to children is desirable. But parents and educators should know that going to extremes in this case is harmful. Attar believes that loving the children excessively causes that he is brought up as a weak and powerless person and loses his self-confidence. So, he shows weakness in the face of problems. But if he is educated with moderation, he will act accordingly. Too much attention to children makes them timid. Treating the children with justice and fairness is one of the Divine attributes. According to Attar, parents should not discriminate between their children and should deal with them justly in all aspects just as you like to be treated with justice in all situations. In many educational books, it is said that the apparent treatment of parents with children may vary according to their age and gender and this is difference rather than discrimination. Attar states that we should act carefully and accurately. These differences should not make parents not act fairly in loving children, but they should justify the children that if they were in such a situation, they would receive the same treatment. Discrimination and injustice in the family, whether tangible or intangible, cause that children feel contempt and become alienated from their family and education.

**Keywords:** educational views, ethical views, Attar Neishabouri, educational methods

### 1. Introduction

Today's world is grateful to the teachers who have offered people the new ways of training in the field of education for many years. In the Islamic world and our society, prominent figures also came into existence and presented great views on education and ethics. Investigating their views on education and ethics can help individuals to better perform their duties. Attar Neishabouri, a poet, scholar and prominent Iranian writer, is among those who could offer good ethical and instructive opinions in education system.

Attar did not have a special book on education, but he has stated his educational and ethical views in the form of poems and stories in the chapters of *Mantiq al-Tayr*, *Tazkirah al-Awliya*, *Asrar Name* and *Elahi Name*.

Attar has been able to present some information about factors affecting the training of individuals and educational principles along with methods of training and even educational perspectives of parents towards children in the family in the form of his stories, anecdotes and poems.

Attar is one of the first poets who has composed separate poems in Persian to explain mystical purposes. It has been also said that Attar was not as skillful as Sanaei, but he enjoyed more perfection.

In one part of his anecdotes, he refers to the perfect man who can be considered a very good criterion for moral and educational distinctions of people. He clearly states the features of the perfect man along with examples, which perhaps are the same as the views of many education scholars in attaining human perfection.

Attar has examined the intellect from the viewpoint of philosophers (Socrates-Aristotle) and in one occasion, he

considered intellect as the main cause of universal truth. In addition, he also expresses that someone who lives under the command of intellect is destined to achieve it and this applies to a limited group. At one point, he also talks about the limits of intellect.

With a little attention to studies, stories and anecdotes of Attar, it can be found that teachers, educators and parents are often faced with difficulty when pointing out ethical and educational tips to children and students in schools since some people do not accept ethical and educational points. But Attar like Saadi has miraculously provided educational points in his works using modern methods in such a way that not only middle-aged people and adults, but also adolescents and youths enjoy reading those anecdotes and can implement them in their lives or education.

Attar has considered cultural and economic situations as effective in the education of people and has stated that new methods and information technology of teachers and parents will not be effective in the education of children and students unless social conditions and origins of that community also welcome them.

In the present study, a comparison has been made between the educational methods of Attar and Saadi Shirazi, according to which it is concluded that Attar's educational views are more comprehensive and more updated compared to other education scholars, mystics and poets.

Attar sees heredity and environment as two very important factors in educational method. He also considers self-consciousness as effective and recommends the Muslim rulers of society to work more on this aspect. At one point, he argues that children's education is not one-sided but two-sided. Attar believes that motivation is necessary in learning because its effectiveness cannot be determined without motivation. So, the condition for effective learning includes motivation and self-consciousness.

Attar traces the perfect man's self-consciousness based on worldview. Thus, with this research, the importance of the issue to Attar becomes clear and we realize that he has been seeking for the real perfection of man in his lifetime and has attempted to guide him everywhere and with every appearance (Note 1).

## **2. Theoretical Foundations of Research**

Man is the main issue in education and is considered one of its fundamental principles. Hence, before expressing the educational views of each school, it is better to deal with man's structure and the characteristics which make him distinct from other animals plus his various talents. The issue of man has had a history in other cultures. Some scholars have argued about the origin of this topic. Attar views the real human being as consisting of soul and body, each of which has its own features. He likens the relationship between these two to the relation between bird and cage. One day, that bird becomes released from the prison of the body and migrates to its original home. From Attar's viewpoint, human beings are complicated and mysterious. This complexity has given man certain grandeur and has made him a trustee and master of the universe.

In Islamic schools, human being is assumed as two-dimensional. On one hand, he is considered as angel and on the other hand, he is viewed as infidel and hasty. Two-dimensionality of human being reveals that man is free to choose either non-religious and evil traits or religious and desirable characteristics.

With a little reflection, we see that Attar knows the full interpretations with all the attributes related to education and states that their truth is the same and has been manifested in certain individuals in different periods. They believe that parents and teachers are manifesters of morality and their education is perfect.

## **3. Objectives of Education from the Perspective of Attar**

Human perfection in educational system is dependent on achieving the highest human goals and the ultimate goal, namely Qurb-e-Ilahi (Divine Nearness) so that in the book "Objectives of education in Shariatmadari's view", virtue, wisdom, human interaction, worship of God, brotherhood and cooperation, friendship, fostering the thinking power and social spirit are considered as basic educational objectives. Here, we briefly refer to some of these objectives.

### **1- Monotheism and worship of God (as a basic educational objective)**

Attar, a man of perfection, after passing different stages, ultimately gained access to God's kingdom. He views proximity as equal to annihilation, like a butterfly which burns itself in the fire of the candle and is destroyed.

If you gain access to God's kingdom.

You will be placed among the accepted (Elahi Name, p. 153).

### **2- Humility and modesty (as an educational objective)**

Although the perfect man has high status and the world revolves around him, he is humble in front of others and

no ostentation and pride exist in him because modesty is a trait of great men.

### 3- Altruism and brotherhood (as an educational objective)

Altruism like brotherhood is one of the educational objectives and good characters, which is considered as one of the primary provisions of the seekers of the right way and can be described in various languages.

Everything that is far from loyalty.

Is not allowable in the scope of manliness (Mantiq al-Tayr, p. 150)

## 4. Principles of Education from the Viewpoint of Attar

To achieve the goals and objectives of education, parents, teachers and education planners should put the rules and principles as the basis for education and choose the appropriate methods.

Important principles of education from the viewpoint of Attar are as follows:

### 4.1 Principle of Sense of Taste Recognition and Talent Identification

Although humans are similar in appearance, they are different in terms of talent, intelligence, taste and carnal preparations. Discovering various talents and abilities of people and making them flourish help to accelerate the completion and development of society and individuals and reduce the waste of forces. Thus, in various poems about the educated and perfect man, Attar deals with introducing different natures, talents and attitudes of individuals and shows parts of the lives of different groups of people. In all of these matters, he claims that the foundation of his prose and poetry is based on people's mentalities, moods, mental capacity and thought. To identify the individuals' intellects, their attitudes, abilities and talents should be first discovered and then, we can take action in the order of abilities.

Finally, he refers to the identification of individuals' talents and interests and the manner of dealing with them and states the results of these interactions as love and affection.

### 4.2 Expression of Love as an Educational Principle in Attar's View

Love, in addition to be a natural human need, is considered the most important factor in mental health and its absence causes mental disorders. So, education is based on constructive, successful and effective love.

What is important in education is the mutual attachment between the trainer and trainee. Love and affection should be expressed without concealing imperfections and deficiencies to create mutual interest between the teacher and student. In this way, the path to perfection is not blocked; but we should be careful not to show our defects as talent.

### 4.3 Modifying Environmental Conditions as an Educational Objective in Attar's View

The basis of this principle is the feature of human impactability from different environmental conditions including temporal, spatial and social conditions. According to this feature, the root of some of human thoughts, intentions and behavior should be sought in environmental conditions. Change in human behavior under spatial and temporal circumstances, especially social conditions, is the source of changes in attitudes, thoughts, positions and modeling methods.

### 4.4 Principle of Reasoning as an Educational Objective in Attar's View

This principle is concerned with the feature of human thinking. In fact, people are involved in thinking. Reasoning is a certain kind of thinking. So, what is desirable is directed thinking which is equivalent to reasoning. With regard to the principle of reasoning, educational methods should be in such ways that regulate the intellectual attempts of human beings so that their guidance towards truth and knowledge will be achieved.

In Attar's opinion, knowledge of Divine secrets is not possible with intellect alone. Such an endeavor finally leads to ignorance, aberrance and heresy since understanding these secrets is beyond the power of intellect. To answer vague questions, both intellect and reasoning must be applied. Attar in Mantiq al-Tayr has completely stated the amount of intellectual manifestation and the scope of its power. Many of the great men in our religion say that no worship is like thinking.

## 5. Methods of Education from the Perspective of Attar

Methods of education are applied after determining its goals. Developing the methods should be well-considered, applicable and comprehensive since an educator with the right approach can achieve the intended goals. Attar in a series of books in the form of poems and stories has referred to interesting educational methods. Here, we state some of them according to the necessity and transparency of the method.

### 5.1 *Integration of Knowledge and Practice*

In Attar Neishabouri's view, a science that is not accompanied by practice cannot be effective in society. Knowledge without practice is a useless effort. Attar recommends that educators should be committed to the implementation of their speech and knowledge should be accompanied by practice. If scholars, educators and teachers do not put their words into practice, credit of science disappears since validity of knowledge is dependent on practice. Otherwise, its effect will be the same as what Attar says in *Mantiq al-Tayr*: "Actions speak louder than words".

### 5.2 *Reward and Punishment (One of Educational Principles)*

In Attar's works, reward and punishment and praise and reprimand have a special place since Attar in explaining the features of a teacher believes that he must possess knowledge, tolerance, morality and peace and considers punishment and reprimand as effective in education. Basically, the great men like Imam Mohammad Ghazali, Avicenna, Nasir al-Din Tusi and those who believe in punishment view it as effective and applicable. Attar also argues that one of the main ways effective in the non-repetition of the wrong behavior is silence. By silence, Attar means to stop talking. He says, when talking with people and companionship with them has no result but aberrance and ignorance, silence is the way to be rescued.

### 5.3 *Endurance and Perseverance*

Perseverance in education like all other areas makes humans successful, mature and experienced and keeps them away from hopelessness and pamperedness. Education with endurance can be effective and produce a result. Attar declares that although patience and endurance in the face of problems seems unpleasant, suffering to achieve the goals gives pleasure to humans. If man does not suffer anguish and distress, he does not appreciate the value of health and welfare. According to Attar, familiarity with the problems of people is the key to enduring hardships and sufferings. Thanksgiving in the face of difficulties is one method for endurance and perseverance.

#### 5.3.1 What is Thanksgiving?

It means to pay attention to the blessings and see God in those blessings. It also means to tolerate what comes to the seeker from God and not to complain which is one of the perfect men' character since endurance is the remedy for distress.

#### 5.3.2 Factors Affecting Education from the Viewpoint of Attar

History of educational theory clarifies the fact that there is ongoing tension between the theory that considers education as an internal matter with its origin inside the individual and the theory which believes it to be an external matter with its origin outside the individual. The main purpose of education is to train people in such a way that they can personally handle themselves.

#### 5.3.3 Children and the Impact of Educational Stages from the Viewpoint of Attar

In Attar's opinion, the aim of training is to educate self-confident and faithful individuals so that they can be useful for themselves and their society. To reach this stage requires great effort. In a detailed study of Attar's works about education, the following points are obtained: Children can be trained and correct education leads to their elevation; talent is useless without proper training and inappropriate training also has no desirable result. In fact, the individual is responsible for the result and is free to choose between them.

#### 5.3.4 Impact of the Location of Education and Curriculum

Regarding curriculum, Attar focuses all his attention on education and ethics. He believes that the main task of education, in addition to teaching art, is to develop good habits and behaviors in children and students. Education has been mostly performed in mosques or schools.

#### 5.3.5 The Impact of Individual Differences and Talents

Human characteristics such as having a strong body, being handsome or ugly and having limb deficiency make an impact on people's behavior. Therefore, one of the fundamental issues in education is to consider individual differences. This issue has been frequently stated by the great educators from ancient times, but it has been less considered in practice. Attar argues that even when the same people are trained in a similar environment, learners benefit from the environment based on their talents. In one anecdote, it is said that the king put his child under the education of a scholar, but the result was not commensurate with the king's demand. When the scholar was on trial, he said, "I swear by the unity of God that education has been the same for all the trainees, but the talents are different".

### 5.3.6 The Effect of Experience on Education

At one point, Attar has stated experience as sophistication and maturity in life, work and education and at another point, he has defined experience as background and interest. Experience in this concept is the same as expertise in practical and theoretical matters. Wherever an individual has more information, he will have higher position. On the contrary, people with less capability will have lower position proportionally. Here, officials are recommended to gain experience in order to understand their opportunities, difficulties and obstacles. They should feel the problems in person so that problem-solving is performed based on facts.

### 5.3.7 The Effect of Time on Education

Different periods of human life and their role in the effectiveness of education are as follows:

**1- Childhood:** This period is the actual time of training and role-taking. If training in this period is not correctly done, its compensation in adulthood is very difficult or perhaps impossible. Childhood is the stage of obtaining information from the educator and taking the trouble to learn and the result of these efforts will be evident in adulthood. In fact, learning and working hard at this stage are an investment for adulthood (Note 2).

**2- Adolescence and youth:** It is a period of passion, love and power but at the same time, inexperience, feelings, emotional problems and social issues. From Attar's viewpoint, education issues at a young age should be commensurate with the sentiments of the youth because their effect will be greater on them and what they like less can be taught to them more easily.

**3- Old age:** It is a period of weakness and inability, yet time of sophistication and experience. At this stage, weakness and physical inability on one hand and the power of experience and wisdom on the other hand are revealed in human being. But unfortunately, old people lose the power of youthfulness at this age. For Attar, presence of mind and peak of learning are in childhood and adolescence and forgetfulness in these periods is less than the old age.

### 5.3.8 Educational or Ethical Points of Attar and Offering Them to Parents and Children

In Tazkirah al-Awliya, Asrar Name and Elahi Name, Attar traces human being with regard to the advantages and disadvantages in his thinking and all his contradictions and conflicts. In Tazkirah al-Awliya and Asrar Name, happiness exists along with ugliness, sorrow, contradictions that critics have found in him and contradictions that exist in world's affairs.

In this section, 5 items of education and ethical issues are discussed, which in this respect, Attar promotes personal and social ethics: 1) respect for parents; 2) submission and not to humiliate others; 3) customs of leaving belongings; 4) customs of fighting carnal desires; 5) customs of remembering death.

**1- Respect for parents:** Attar says, "When I screamed at my mother out of ignorance, my heart began to cry and said, 'have you forgotten your childhood that you act so impudently'". Men of perfection always obey the commands of God and do not neglect carrying out their duties. Attar says: "Do not obey the Baha'i since it is a form of pagandom, but obedience to parents is obligatory".

**2- Submission and not to humiliate others:** One way to foster human morality and achieve perfection is to comply with scientific and educational rules, but we should not surrender to others. It is necessary to consider other people prior to ourselves and first deal with their problems. This is one of the features for achieving perfection and the perfect man is always pleased with remembering the soil and is never alone.

**3- Customs of leaving belongings:** Attar says, "Perfect man does not belong to anything but God since he sees everything as an obstacle to reach the truth". Perfect man has abandoned all kinds of human belongings. By world, it is meant everything that engages human being and separates him from God.

**4- Customs of fighting carnal desires:** Moving through the path of knowledge is very difficult because an important enemy, namely carnal desires, lies in ambush for the seeker and creates difficulties for him at any moment. It is clear that by carnal desires, it is meant concupiscence which commands individuals to do evil and man's obsessions cause him trouble.

Attar believes that the light which is created inside man due to presidency should not make him proud since it is the light of carnal desires. Attar quotes these words from hoopoe which boasts about its presidency.

If you have light inside you, it is what you have achieved.

If you have an aptitude, it is what you suppose.

(Mantiq al-Tayr, p. 16)

It can be perceived that Attar makes a subtle difference between disappearance and annihilation and they can be understood with accurate and delicate faith. Attar refers to the central point: “replacing evil traits with good characters”. Seeker abandons unacceptable traits and stabilizes good characteristics.

I disappeared/ I got lost/ I became nothing/ I remained a shadow/ I was wrapped in armor/ I was a drop/ I got lost in mystery/ I do not find a drop at this time (Mantiq al-Tayr, p. 229)

## 6. Conclusion

Generally, discussion about the views and opinions of Attar, the greatest Iranian poet and writer, in the field of education is a complicated task and requires extensive research. Attar is a wise philosopher and pious mystic. He is a poet who has written poems with supreme eloquence. His works including poetry and prose embrace the educational thoughts of this great educator.

Attar like a psychologist and even an educational sociologist deals with the acquisition of human social behavior. As a philosopher and mystic, he also studies ethical issues and their role in human relations. In discussing ethics which makes up a major part of educational discussions, Attar does not only preach or recommend, but he attempts to shed light on moral concepts and discusses the effects of human actions. What a teacher should observe in dealing with students and also providing timely encouragement can be seen in Attar’s poems.

Attar’s educational and ethical views proposed in Tazkirah al-Awliya, Mosibat Name, Elahi Name and Mantiq al-Tayr should be organized systematically so that there is the possibility of providing his comments and opinions. With careful study of the contents of these books, we notice that they can be used as a pattern of behavior in the classroom.

Attar considers good behavior as a factor in establishing communication. He views reward as effective in repeating the desired behavior, ranging from smiling to giving a prize. But punishment is applied in order to prevent the child from repeating the bad behavior and can create a spark in his conscious mind. So, it is better to use encouragement to enhance the good behavior of children. But encouragement should be provided timely, adequately and proportionate to the age of the child. In addition, encouragement can be applied for the adults.

Attar argues that if the character of the trainee is shaped unfavorably, making changes in his behavior will be difficult unless we prepare the way for correction. In his opinion, words and actions of teachers and parents are major factors in education and teaching ethical standards. Attar, while considering the role of human rationality in ethical education of people, discusses both ethics and the effects of training.

From the viewpoint of Attar, those who are educable and mentally prepared can be trained and those who ridicule everything or show selfishness, their efforts are futile. However, encouragement could be helpful and leads the individual to self-consciousness.

Attar is aware of the role of education and training for children and considers the teaching of some points such as eating habits and self-purification as essential in the fruitful period of childhood so that these features become a part of children’s nature. Attar, while having belief in Divine Destiny, does not reject the effect of human will on changing the fate and this is one of the differences between the views of Attar and those of Saadi. In the review of educational perspectives of Saadi, it was found that he considers two factors of heredity (genetics) and parents as vital in the growth and promotion of human being and then, he proposed the role of environment (peers, family, school and society).

In addition to two above-mentioned factors, Attar views the individual’s self-consciousness as effective and essential, that is, if a person is prepared and decides, he can even act better than his parents. Otherwise, the reverse can happen. In this regard, moderation and parents’ behavior towards children, considering the individual differences and talents of children and observing health and educational issues are recommended to parents. Summary of Attar’s recommendations to educators and parents in dealing with children is as follows:

- 1) Parents’ method in educating the children should be based on encouragement rather than reprimand and punishment.
- 2) Educators and parents in dealing with children should follow moderation not discrimination or even difference.
- 3) Individual differences and talents of children for learning should be taken into account.
- 4) Reasonability of the teacher’s words and deeds is of great importance.
- 5) Teacher’s conduct and behavior should be based on friendship, affection and non-humiliation of others.
- 6) According to God’s truth, power of intellect alone is not sufficient.

7) When expressing his matters, the teacher should pay attention to the taste and talents of the listeners. Otherwise, it is possible that they do not listen to his words.

Finally, what can be understood from the efforts and works of this mystic and moral philosopher of 6th century AD, including his Masnavi (rhyming couplets), is that the education of children and the interaction of educators and parents with them are of central importance. Thus, attempts have been made to gather everything that corresponds with the conditions of the time and can be useful for the new generation. It is hoped that individuals interested in education and ethics engage in reviewing the opinions and views of such great men as Attar Neishabouri and write books like them. Inshallah!

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### Notes

Note 1. Works of Attar, discussion about works, states and thoughts of Attar, Qasem Ghani, pp. 117-118.

Note 2. Zabour-e-Parsi: A look at the life and sonnets of Attar, Mohammad Reza Shafiei Kadkani, p. 125.

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