

ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND ETHICS IN THE FAREWELL SERMON OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW): A MODEL FOR VALUE RE-ORIENTATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract:

The Farewell Sermon of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), delivered during his final pilgrimage, encapsulates the core values of Islamic education and ethics. This paper explores the sermon as a timeless source of moral instruction and spiritual guidance, emphasizing its relevance to contemporary Nigeria. The Prophet's teachings on justice, equality, gender respect, honesty, and the sanctity of life and property offer a holistic framework for value re-orientation in a society facing moral and ethical challenges. Using a qualitative research design, the study employs textual and content analysis of classical and contemporary Islamic sources, alongside documentary review of Nigerian educational and moral contexts. It further draws on interpretive analysis to identify the ethical and pedagogical implications of the sermon. Findings reveal that the Farewell Sermon embodies comprehensive principles capable of addressing Nigeria's moral decline, social injustice, and educational gaps. The study establishes that integrating the Prophet's ethical teachings into the Islamic education curriculum can foster moral consciousness, civic responsibility, and national unity. It concludes that the Farewell Sermon provides an ideal and practical model for reforming Nigeria's moral orientation and promoting value-based education.

Keywords: Farewell Sermon; Islamic education; ethics; value re-orientation; Nigeria; Prophet Muhammad; moral development.

Introduction

Education in Islam transcends the mere acquisition of knowledge; it embodies a transformative process aimed at nurturing ethical conduct, spiritual awareness, and societal responsibility. At the heart of Islamic pedagogy lies a deep integration of education and morality, as exemplified in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam* (Peace and blessing of Allah blessings of Allah be upon him). Among the most comprehensive ethical declarations in Islamic history is the Prophet's Farewell Sermon (*Khutbat al-Wada'*), delivered during his final pilgrimage in the 10th year after *hijrah* (migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah) - (632 CE). Addressing over one hundred thousand followers, the Prophet conveyed essential principles that encapsulate the core of Islamic ethics and educational philosophy.

In the Farewell Sermon, the Prophet (SAW) addressed critical social and moral issues—such as justice, equality, respect for women, economic fairness, and human dignity—in a manner that remains relevant across centuries and cultures. These teachings not only serve as a moral compass for individuals but also offer a holistic framework for educational institutions and policy makers. His method of communication—clear, repetitive, values-centered—demonstrates the ideal model of prophetic pedagogy aimed at long-term value transmission.

In Nigeria, a nation blessed with a vibrant Islamic heritage and a large Muslim population, the relevance of Islamic ethics and education cannot be overstated. Despite the presence of various Islamic institutions—ranging from traditional Qur'anic schools (*Tsangaya*), Islamiyyah, and modern Islamic colleges—there is growing concern over the moral decay and value crisis afflicting Nigerian society. Corruption, social injustice, youth delinquency, and gender-based violations

indicate a disconnect between religious knowledge and ethical practice. These challenges call for a reorientation that goes beyond structural reforms to include a return to foundational values rooted in the prophetic model.

This article explores the ethical and educational teachings embedded in the Farewell Sermon and analyzes their implications for value re-orientation in Nigeria. It argues that the sermon offers not only spiritual guidance but also a practical roadmap for reviving moral consciousness, promoting justice, and reforming Islamic education to meet the ethical demands of modern Nigerian society.

The Farewell Sermon as a Moral and Educational Text

The Farewell Sermon (*Khutbat al-Wada'*) stands as one of the most profound moral discourses in Islamic history. Delivered by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) during his only and final Hajj, it served not only as a farewell message to his followers but as a comprehensive guide summarizing the ethical, legal, and educational foundations of Islam. The sermon encapsulates what can be termed as a universal charter of human values, rooted in divine revelation and prophetic wisdom.

The Prophet as an Educator

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is referred to by Allah in the Qur'an as a teacher and purifier:

It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom... (Qur'an 62:2).

This verse highlights the Prophet's dual role as a transmitter of knowledge (*ta'lim*) and moral refinement (*tazkiyah*). His delivery of the Farewell Sermon reflected this mission—combining instructional clarity with moral appeal, aimed at ensuring the message remained engraved in the hearts and minds of his audience.

Structure and Content

The sermon covered a range of ethical and legal issues, including:

- i. Sanctity of life and property:
Your blood, your property, and your honor are as sacred as this day, this month, and this city (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 1739).
- ii. Racial and ethnic equality:
No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, and no white to a black, except by piety and good action (Musnad Ahmad, vol. 5, p. 411).
- iii. Women's rights and marital ethics:
Treat women kindly, for they are your partners and committed helpers (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith no. 1851).

These declarations illustrate the comprehensive educational value of the sermon. It was not merely a spiritual reminder but a well-structured lesson on social justice, ethical conduct, and mutual rights.

Method of Delivery and Educational Techniques

The Prophet's method of delivery was deeply pedagogical:

- I. He spoke slowly and repeated key points to aid memory and internalization (Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, vol. 1).
- ii. He used analogies—comparing the sanctity of life to the sanctity of time and place.

iii. He encouraged audience participation by asking them to bear witness and convey the message:

Let those who are present convey it to those who are absent (Sahih Muslim, Hadith no. 1218).

These elements align with modern principles of effective teaching: clarity, repetition, audience engagement, and moral motivation.

Relevance as an Ethical Framework

As observed by Kamali (2010), the sermon presents a “Qur'anic vision of society grounded in justice, dignity, and ethical accountability.” It functions as a moral constitution that not only governs private behavior but shapes communal and educational structures. When applied in educational settings, especially in contexts like Nigeria, it has the potential to redefine learning as a process of value cultivation, not just academic instruction.

Ethical Themes of the Farewell Sermon and their Application to Value Re-orientation in Nigeria

The Farewell Sermon is rich with ethical principles that speak to universal human values. These themes are not only central to Islamic ethics but highly relevant to Nigeria's current moral and social challenges. This section highlights key ethical teachings from the sermon and discusses their application to value re-orientation in Nigeria.

i. Equality and Human Dignity

The Prophet (SAW) declared:

All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab... (Musnad Ahmad, vol. 5, p. 411).

This statement affirms the principle of equality, rejecting all forms of racial, ethnic, or tribal discrimination. In a country like Nigeria, where ethnic and religious divisions often fuel conflict and favoritism, this teaching promotes national unity, respect for diversity, and social harmony. Educational institutions can play a role by instilling this value of equality in school curricula and classroom interaction.

ii. Justice and Fairness

Another ethical foundation of the sermon is the emphasis on justice:

Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 1739).

In a society facing systemic corruption, abuse of power, and exploitation, the Prophet's call for justice is particularly relevant. Islamic education in Nigeria should emphasize justice as a core civic and spiritual responsibility, encouraging young Muslims to reject bribery, nepotism, and oppression in all forms.

iii. Sanctity of Life, Property, and Honor

The Prophet (SAW) equated the sanctity of human life and property with the sacredness of the Day of Arafah, the month of Dhul-Hijjah, and the city of Makkah (Sahih Muslim, Hadith no. 1218).

This pronouncement upholds the protection of life, wealth, and dignity as inviolable rights.

In Nigeria, where insecurity, violence, and injustice threaten these values, this teaching can serve as a moral compass. Educators and religious leaders should use the sermon to reinforce the inviolability of human rights in both private and public spheres.

iv. Rights of Women

The Prophet (SAW) addressed the treatment of women directly:

O People, fear Allah regarding women. You have taken them as a trust from Allah...
(Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith no. 1851).

This affirms women's dignity, rights, and the mutual responsibilities of spouses. In Nigeria, where gender-based violence and discrimination remain prevalent, this sermon provides a powerful argument for women's empowerment, family ethics, and mutual respect. Islamic education should integrate teachings on the rights and responsibilities of both genders, especially in *Madrasahs* and *Islamiyyah* schools.

v. Accountability and Transmission of Knowledge

The Prophet ended the sermon by declaring:

You will be asked about me. What will you say?" They said, "We bear witness that you have conveyed the message... (Sahih Muslim, Hadith no. 1218).

This call to witness underscores the Islamic concept of moral accountability—before God and society. It also places responsibility on the community to transmit authentic knowledge.

In Nigeria, Islamic teachers (*Malamai*) must see themselves as trustees of moral guidance, not just dispensers of religious information. Reforming Islamic education to include ethical modeling, critical thinking, and spiritual mentorship will promote long-term value re-orientation.

Relevance to Nigerian Youths

The majority of Nigeria's population is youth, many of whom face moral confusion, unemployment, and religious misguidance. The Prophet's universal message offers a balanced ethical worldview that counters extremism, materialism, and hopelessness.

Embedding the values of the Farewell Sermon into youth education—especially in Islamic schools, tertiary institutions, and *da'wah* programs—can inspire a new generation of morally grounded, socially responsible Nigerian Muslims.

Educational Implications for Reforming Islamic Education in Nigeria

The ethical principles enshrined in the Farewell Sermon are not only timeless moral directives; they also provide a blueprint for transforming Islamic education in Nigeria. This section highlights how these principles can inform the reform of curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional values in Islamic educational settings across the country.

Integrating Ethics into Curriculum

Despite the widespread presence of Islamic schools—*Tsangaya*, *Islamiyyah*, and modern Islamic institutions—many lack a structured approach to moral and civic education. The Farewell Sermon, with its emphasis on honesty, justice, gender respect, and accountability, provides a solid foundation for developing a values-based curriculum.

As Ahmad (2013) notes, a meaningful Islamic curriculum must not only teach religious rituals but also instill moral behavior and social responsibility. Topics such as justice ('*adl*), trust (*amanah*), and respect for life and property can be designed as modules to be taught alongside *Fiqh*, *Qur'an*, and *Hadith*.

Teacher Training and Ethical Modeling

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was not only a source of divine knowledge but also an exemplary role model (*uswah hasanah*) for his companions and students (Qur'an 33:21). Islamic teachers (*Malamai*) in Nigeria should be trained not only in content delivery but also in moral leadership and character development.

According to Al-Attas (1993), the purpose of Islamic education is “to produce a good man.” This objective can only be achieved if teachers embody the ethics they teach, following the Prophet's model of patience, humility, compassion, and consistency.

Contextualizing Moral Teachings for Nigerian Society

Moral instruction must address real-life situations relevant to Nigerian youth. For instance:

- iv. The Prophet's emphasis on anti-corruption (e.g., returning trusts) can be linked to civic education and anti-graft campaigns.
- v. His call for peaceful coexistence can be integrated into programs addressing religious extremism and ethnic conflict.

As Yusuf (2019) suggests, contextualizing Islamic ethics in local realities strengthens their impact and relevance in society.

Promoting Dialogue and Critical Thinking

Islamic education must move beyond rote memorization to include discussion, reflection, and application. The Prophet (SAW), during the Farewell Sermon, engaged his audience by asking rhetorical questions and encouraging reflection:

Have I not conveyed the message?” They replied, “Yes.” He said, “O Allah, bear witness (Sahih Muslim, Hadith no. 1218).

This method fosters active participation and a sense of ownership. In Nigeria, learners must be encouraged to reflect critically on ethical dilemmas and societal issues through group discussions, debates, and ethical case studies.

Institutional Reforms and Policy Recommendations

For lasting impact, the following reforms are recommended:

- vi. Islamic education regulatory bodies should adopt value-based accreditation criteria.
- vii. Islamic Studies at secondary and tertiary levels should include modules on prophetic ethics and national development.
- viii. Collaboration between government and Islamic institutions in promoting moral re-orientation programs, particularly for youth and at-risk communities.

The integration of the Farewell Sermon's ethics into Nigeria's Islamic education system is not merely a spiritual necessity—it is a national imperative. It offers a peaceful, holistic, and indigenous framework to address the moral crisis affecting education and society at large.

Conclusion

The Farewell Sermon of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is not only a historical moment in Islamic civilization but also a profound moral and educational legacy. Its ethical teachings—grounded in justice, equality, dignity, accountability, and compassion—represent a universal charter that addresses both individual conduct and societal structures. When applied to the Nigerian context, the sermon serves as a powerful instrument for value re-orientation at a time when the nation faces profound moral and educational challenges.

This article has examined how the principles embedded in the Farewell Sermon can be harnessed to reform Islamic education in Nigeria. It argued that the integration of these values into curricula, teacher training, institutional governance, and pedagogical practice can contribute significantly to national development by producing morally upright, socially responsible, and intellectually sound citizens.

In a society battling corruption, injustice, youth delinquency, and religious extremism, there is a dire need to reconnect Islamic education with its ethical core. The Prophet's final address provides a model of prophetic pedagogy—rooted in wisdom, simplicity, clarity, and moral clarity—that can transform hearts, minds, and institutions. Nigerian Muslim educators, policymakers, and religious leaders must rise to the challenge of reviving this legacy to build a society that is not only knowledgeable but also virtuous.

As the Prophet (SAW) reminded his audience at the end of his sermon:

Let those who are present convey it to those who are absent (Sahih Muslim, Hadith no. 1218).

The responsibility to transmit these values now falls on contemporary educators—especially in Nigeria—who must ensure that the Farewell Sermon is not just remembered, but lived.

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