Principles of Enjoining Right and Forbidding wrong from the Qur'an and Sunnah

– Influencing Positive Change locally



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This Material is an Abridged Version of the Book:

The Prophet's Methods of Correcting People's Mistakes

الأساليب النبوية في التعامل أخطاء الناس

إنجليزي

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Publisher's Note

Learning the basic religious knowledge is obligatory in Islam. Islam encourages learning in general and learning about Islam in particular. Teaching people is one of the greatest good deeds as its benefits spread to others. Educationalists are concerned with the best methods of teaching in all fields, so the Muslim teachers must be more concerned about methodology.

Prophet Muhammad (ρ) was the best teacher mankind ever knew. His methods were not only the best, but divinely guided. He very often used various methods to teach his Companions the religion of Islam. Among his methods were, question and answer, narratives of the past revealed to him, indirect approaches to correct mistakes, and watching other people's during prayer and correcting what they did wrongly. He was very kind and humble when correcting mistakes. He never embarrassed anybody who made a mistake. In this book, the author has shown us all the methods of the Prophet (ρ) in correcting people's mistakes. If we compare these methods to the most modern teaching methods, we will find that they are the best though more than 1400 years have elapsed since the Prophet (ρ) practised them.

I pray to Allah (SWT) to benefit the readers by these methods of teaching and to enable them to follow them when teaching Islam or any other branch of knowledge, as they are the best known. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon Muhammad (ρ), his family, his Companions and their followers till the Day of Reckoning. Ameen.

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In the Name of Allah, All-Compassionate, All Merciful

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, Master of the Day of Judgement, God of the first and the last, Sustainer of heaven and earth, and peace and blessings be upon His trustworthy Prophet (ρ), the Teacher of mankind, sent as a Mercy to the worlds.

Teaching people is one of the greatest good deeds whose benefits spread to others. It is the da'iahs (callers to Islam) and educators' share of the heritage of the Prophets and Messengers.

> *"Allah (SWT) and the angels, and even the ant in its nest and the whale in the sea will pray for the one who teaches people the ways of good." (Reported by At-Tirmidhi; Sunan At-Tirmidhi, Ahmad Shaakir edition, No. 2685. Abu 'Eesa said, this is a saheeh ghareeb hasan hadeeth).*

There are different types and ways of teaching, with different means and methods, one of which is correcting mistakes. Correcting mistakes is a part of education; they are like inseparable twins.

Dealing with and correcting mistakes is also a part of sincerity in religion (*naseehah*) which is a duty on all Muslims. The connection between this and the concept of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil, which is also a duty, is quite obvious (but we should note that the area of mistakes is broader than the area of evil (*munkar*), so a mistake may or may not be evil as such).

Then Allah (SWT) said:

> *"And why did you not, when you heard it, say – 'It is not right for us to speak of this. Glory be to You (O Allah), this is a great lie'? Allah forbids you from it*

and warns you not to repeat the like of it forever, if you are believers." [An-Noor 24:16-17]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was guided by the Light of his Lord in following the principle of denouncing evil and correcting mistakes with no compromise. From this and other reports the scholars (may Allah have mercy on them) derived the principle: it is not permitted for the Prophet to delay speaking up and explaining mistakes from its appropriate time."

Understanding the Prophet's methodology in dealing with the mistakes of the people he met is of great importance, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was guided by his Lord, and his words and deeds were supported by revelation, and confirmed or corrected as needed. His methods are wiser and more efficacious, and using his approach is the best way to get people to respond positively. If the one who is in a position to guide and teach others adopts these methods and this approach, his efforts will be successful. Following the method and approach of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also involves following his example, for he is the best example for us, and this will lead us to a great reward from Allah, if our intention is sincere.

We must point out that the practical application of this methodology in real life relies heavily on *ijtihaad* (studying the situation and attempting to determine the best approach) to a great extent. This involves selecting the best methods for a particular situation. Whoever understands people's nature will be able to notice similarities between real life situations and situations described in the texts, so he will be able to choose the most appropriate method from among the methods of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

This book is an attempt to study the methods of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in dealing with mistakes made by people of different levels and backgrounds, among those who lived with him and with whom he interacted. I ask Allah to make it successful and free of mistakes, to benefit my Muslim brothers and me through it, for He (ρ) is in control of all things and He (ρ) is able to do this, and He (ρ) is the Guide to the Straight Path.

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POINTS TO BE NOTED WHEN DEALING WITH MISTAKES

Before we embark on our discussion, we should note some issues and considerations that we should bear in mind before and when dealing with and correcting the mistakes of others.

Sincerity towards Allah

When correcting the mistakes of others, it is essential that one's intention be to earn the pleasure of Allah, not to demonstrate one's superiority or to vent one's anger or to impress others.

At-Tirmidhi (may Allah have mercy on him) reported from Shufayy al-Asbahi that Abu Hurayrah began to gasp severely, and his head fell forward, and I supported him with my shoulder for a long time, then he recovered, and said: 'The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told me:

> *'When the Day of Judgement comes, Allah will come down to judge between the people. And every nation will be kneeling in submission. The first people to be called forth will be a man who had learned the Qur`an by heart, a man who was killed for the sake of Allah and a man who had a lot of wealth. Allah will say to the reciter [of the Qur`an], 'Did I not teach you that which I had revealed to My Messenger?' He will say, 'Of course, My Lord.' Allah will say, 'What did you do with what you were taught?' He will say, 'I stayed up at night and during the day (to recite it).' Allah will say, 'You have lied,' and the angels will say, 'You have lied.' Allah will say, 'You only wanted it to be said that so-and-so is a reader, and it was said.' The one who had a lot of wealth will be brought and Allah will say to him, 'Did I not give generously to you so*

that you were not in need of anyone?' He will say, 'Of course, O Lord.' Allah will say, 'What did you do with what I gave you?' He will say, 'I used to give it to my relatives and in charity.' Allah will say, 'You have lied,' and the angels will say, 'You have lied.' Allah will say, 'You only wanted it to be said that so-and-so is generous, and it was said. Then the one who was killed for the sake of Allah will be brought and Allah will say to him, 'What were you killed for?' He will say, 'I was commanded to fight in jihaad for Your sake so I fought until I was killed.' Allah will say, 'You have lied,' and the angels will say, 'You have lied.' Allah will say, 'You only want it to be said that so-and-so was courageous, and it was said.' Then the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) struck my knees and said, 'O Abu Hurayrah, these three are the first people for whom the Fire will be heated on the Day of Resurrection.'" (Sunan At-Tirmidhi, No. 2382, Shaakir edition. Abu 'Eesa said: this is a ghareeb hasan hadeeth).

If the intention of the person giving advice is sincere, he will earn reward and his advice will be accepted and acted upon, by the permission of Allah.

Making Mistakes is Part of Human Nature

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

"Every son of Adam makes mistakes, and the best of those who make mistakes are those who repent." (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, no. 2499, and by Ibn Maajah, who narrated this version – As-Sunan edition, by 'Abd al-Baqi, No. 4251)

Bearing this fact clearly in mind will put things into their proper perspective, so the educator should not expect people to be perfect or infallible or judge them according to

what he thinks they should be, and then consider them to have failed if they make a big mistake or err repeatedly. He should deal with them in a realistic manner, based on his knowledge of human nature which is subject to ignorance, negligence, shortcomings, whims and desires and forgetfulness.

Understanding this fact will also prevent an educator from being greatly shocked by the kind of sudden mistake that could lead him to react in an inappropriate fashion. This will remind the da'iyah and educator who is striving to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil that he too is a human being who could also make the same mistake, so he should deal with him on a footing of compassion rather than harshness, because the basic aim is to reform, not to punish.

But this does not mean that we should leave people who are making mistakes alone, or find excuses for those who are committing sins on the basis that they are only human or that they are just youngsters, or that the modern age is full of temptations and so on. We must denounce the actions and call the people to account, but at the same time we must evaluate their actions according to Islam.

The more serious a mistake is, the more effort should be made to correct it.

Efforts to correct mistakes that have to do with 'aqeedah should be greater than those to correct mistakes that have to do with etiquette, for example. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was intensely concerned about dealing with and correcting mistakes that had to do with shirk in all its forms, because this was the most important matter. Examples of this follow. Al-Mugheerah ibn Shu'bah said:

> *"There was an eclipse of the sun on the day that [the Prophet's infant son] Ibraaheem died, and the people said, 'This eclipse is because of the death of*

Ibraaheem.' The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'The sun and the moon are two of the signs of Allah, they do not become eclipsed for the death or life of anyone. If you see them (eclipsed) then call on Allah and pray to Him until the eclipse is over.'" (Reported by al-Bukhaari, Fath, 1061).

Taking into account the position of the person who is striving to correct the mistake.

Some people's advice may be more readily accepted than others' because they have a status that others do not, or because, unlike others, they have authority over the person who has made the mistake, for example, a father with his child or a teacher with his student or a government official with the one whom he is inspecting. One who is older is not like one who is younger, a relative is not like a stranger, a person with authority is not like one with no authority. Understanding these differences will make the reformer put things into perspective and evaluate them properly, so that his rebuke or correction will not lead to a greater evil. The position of the one who is rebuking and the esteem in which he is held by the one who has made the mistake are very important in judging how strong the rebuke should be and deciding how harsh or gentle the tone should be. From this we learn two things:

Firstly, that the person to whom Allah has given status or authority should use that to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and to teach people. He should understand that he has a great responsibility because people will accept more from him than from other people – usually – so he can do more than others can.

Secondly, the person who seeks to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil should not misjudge the situation and put himself in a higher position than is in fact the case and behave as if he has qualities that he does not have, because this will only put people off.

Al-Bukhaari narrated that Seereen asked Anas to write him a contract of manumission, as he had plenty of money, but Anas refused. Seereen went to Caliph 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), who told Anas to write the document, and Anas still refused, so 'Umar hit him with a whip whilst reciting the words (interpretation of the meaning):

> *"… give them [slaves seeking emancipation] such writing [of a document of manumission], if you know that they are good and trustworthy…" [An-Noor 24:33]*

…so he wrote the document for him[1].

Maalik reported from Abu'l-Zubayr al-Makki that a man proposed marriage to another man's sister, and he [the brother] told him that she had committed zinaa. News of this reached Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (τ), so he hit him or nearly hit him, and said, "Why did you tell him?" (Muwatta' Maalik, no. 1553, report of Abu Mus'ab al-Zuhri, ed. by Bashshaar Ma'roof and Mahmood Khaleel. Mu`asaasat al-Risaalah).

We should also note that the Prophet's rebuking of some of his closest Companions was, on occasions, harsher than his rebuking of a bedouin, for example, or a stranger. All of this has to do with wisdom and proper evaluation in rebuking.

Making a distinction between one who errs out of ignorance and one who errs despite his knowledge.

One of the stories that illustrate this clearly is what happened to Mu'aawiyah ibn al-Hakam al-Salami when he came to Madeenah from the desert, and he did not know that it is forbidden to speak during the salaah. He said:

[1] (Al-Fath, 5/184)

> *"Whilst I was praying behind the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), a man sneezed, so I said 'Yarhamuk Allah (may Allah have mercy on you).' The people glared at me, so I said, 'May my mother lose me! What is wrong with you that you are looking at me?' They began to slap their thighs with their hands, and when I saw that they were indicating that I should be quiet, I stopped talking (i.e., I nearly wanted to answer them back, but I controlled myself and kept quiet). When the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had finished praying – may my father and mother be sacrificed for him, I have never seen a better teacher than him before or since – he did not rebuke me or hit me or put me to shame. He just said, 'This prayer should contain nothing of the speech of men; it is only tasbeeh and takbeer and recitation of the Qur`an.'" (Saheeh Muslim, 'Abd al-Baaqi edition, No. 537).*

The ignorant person needs to be taught; the one who has doubts needs to have things explained to him; the negligent person needs to be reminded; and the one who willfully persists in error needs to be warned. It is not right to treat one who knows about a ruling and one who is ignorant of it in the same manner when rebuking them. Treating one who does not know too harshly will only put him off and make him refuse to follow your advice, unlike teaching him with wisdom and gentleness, because an ignorant person simply does not realize that he is making a mistake. It is as if he is saying to the one who is rebuking him: "Why don't you teach me before you launch an attack on me?"

The one who is making a mistake without realizing it may think that he is right, so we should take this into account and deal with him tactfully.

Making a distinction between mistakes stemming from an honest effort to find out what is right (*ijtihaad*), and mistakes done deliberately, out of negligence or because of shortcomings.

There is no doubt that in the first case, a person is not to be blamed; indeed, he will earn one reward even if he is mistaken, so long as his intention was sincere and he tried to reach the right conclusion, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

> *"If a ruler judges and strives to make the right decision, and his decision is correct, he will have two rewards, and if his decision is wrong, he will still have one reward." (Reported by At-Tirmidhi, 1326, Shaakir edition. Abu 'Eesa At-Tirmidhi said it is a ghareeb hasan hadeeth in this version.)*

This is a different case from one who errs deliberately or because of shortcomings. In the first instance, the person should be taught and advised; in the second, he should be warned and rebuked.

The *ijtihaad* which may be excused should be done on the part of one who is qualified, not one who gives fatwas without knowledge and without taking circumstances into account. This is why the Prophet severely denounced the people who made the mistake in the case of the man with the head wound. Abu Dawood narrated in his Sunan from Jaabir (may Allah be pleased with him) who said:

> *"We went out on a journey, and one of the men with us was struck in the head with a stone and started bleeding. Then he slept and when he woke up he needed to do ghusl (he was in state of janaabah or impurity). He asked his companions, 'Do you think I could get away with doing tayammum?' They said, 'We don't think you have any excuse because water is available.' So he*

> *did ghusl, and he died. When we came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and he was told about this, he said, 'They have killed him, may Allah kill them! Why did they not ask if they did not know? The cure of the one who does not know is to ask…'"*[2]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that judges are of three types, one will be in Paradise and the other two in Hell. The type that will be in Paradise is a man who knows the truth and judges accordingly. A man who knows the truth but judges unjustly will be in Hell, and a man who judges between people without proper knowledge will also be in Hell[3]. The third type is not regarded as having any excuse.

Another factor in gauging the degree of rebuking is paying attention to the environment in which the mistake occurred, such as whether it was an environment in which the Sunnah is followed or *bid'ah* is widespread, or how prevalent evil is, or whether there are ignorant or overly lenient people, whose opinions are widely followed, issuing fatwas to say that it is permissible.

Being fair and not being biased when correcting those who make mistakes

Allah says:

> *"And whenever you give your word (i.e., judge between men or give evidence), say the truth…" [al-An'aam 6:152]*

> *"… and when you judge between men, you [should] judge with justice…" [al-Nisa' 4:58]*

[2] Sunan Abi Dawood, Kitaab al- Tahaarah, Baab al-majrooh yatayammam; al-Albaani classed it as hasan in Saheeh Abi Dawood, 325, and indicated that the extra material [not mentioned] added at the end of the hadeeth is da'eef

[3] Sunan Abi Dawood, No. 3573; classed as *Saheeh* by al-Albaani in *Al-Irwa'*, 2164

The fact that Usaamah ibn Zayd was the beloved of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the son of his beloved [Zayd] did not stop the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) from rebuking him most sternly when he tried to intercede regarding one of the punishments (*hudood*) prescribed by Allah. 'Aa`ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) reported that Quraysh were concerned about a woman who stole at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), at the time of the Conquest of Makkah. They said,

> *'Who will speak to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) about her? Who will dare to do this other than Usaamah ibn Zayd, the beloved of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)?' She was brought to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and Usaamah ibn Zayd spoke to him concerning her. The face of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) changed colour and he said: 'Are you interceding concerning one of the punishments prescribed by Allah?' Usaamah said to him, 'Pray for forgiveness for me, O Messenger of Allah.' When evening came, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stood up and addressed the people. He praised Allah as He deserves to be praised, then he said: 'The people who came before you were destroyed because if one of their nobles stole, they would let him go, but if one of the weak among them stole, they would carry out the punishment on him. By the One in Whose hand is my soul, if Faatimah the daughter of Muhammad were to steal, I would cut off her hand.' Then he ordered that the woman who had stolen should have her hand cut off." (The hadeeth was reported by al-Bukhaari and Muslim; this version was narrated by Muslim, No. 1688).*

The Prophet's attitude towards Usaamah (may Allah be pleased with him) indicates that he was fair and just, and that Islam came before love of people in his view. A person may put up with the personal faults of whoever he wishes, but he has no right to be tolerant or biased towards those whose mistakes transgress the limits set by Islam.

Sometimes, when a relative or friend makes a mistake, a person does not rebuke him as he would a person whom he does not know, so one may see un-Islamic bias or discrimination in his dealings because of this, and a person may turn a blind eye to his friend's mistake while harshly criticizing another person. [An Arab poet once said:]

"If you are happy with a person, you do not see his mistakes, but if you are angry with him, you see them all."

This may also be reflected in the way in which actions are interpreted. An action on the part of a person one loves will be taken one way, and the same deed on the part of another person will be taken quite differently.

All of the above applies only when circumstances are the same, otherwise there could be different considerations as we will see below.

Being careful lest correcting one mistake leads to a bigger mistake

It is a well-established fact that Islam allows the lesser of two evils in order to repel a greater evil. So a *da'iyah* may keep quiet about one mistake lest saying something lead to a more serious mistake.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) kept quiet about the *munaafiqeen* and did not execute them, even though their *kufr* was well-established. He bore their insults with patience, lest people say, "Muhammad is killing his companions," especially since their true nature was not known to everyone. The Prophet (peace and

blessings of Allah be upon him) did not destroy the Ka'bah in order to rebuild it on the foundations laid by Ibraaheem, out of consideration towards Quraysh who were still new in Islam and too close to their recent *jaahiliyyah*. He (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) feared that it might be too much for them, so he left it as it was, with part missing, and the door set high up and closed to the masses, even though this contains an element of *zulm* (wrongdoing or oppression).

Before this, Allah had told the Muslims not to insult the gods of the *mushrikeen*, even though this is a form of worship, because this could lead to people insulting Allah, which is the worst of evil.

A *da'iyah* may keep quiet about a wrong action, or defer rebuking, or change his approach, if he thinks that by doing so he will avoid a greater evil or mistake. This is not considered to be shortcoming or negligence so long as his intention is sincere and he does not fear anyone except Allah, and it was only concern for the best interests of Islam, not cowardice, that stopped him from saying anything.

We may note that what causes a greater evil when rebuking for one mistake is zealousness which is not checked or controlled.

Making a distinction between mistakes that transgress the limits of Islam and mistakes that only affect other people

If Islam is dearer to us than our own selves, we must defend it and protect it and get angry for its sake more than we get angry for our own sakes and defend our own selves. It is a sign of not having religious feelings if we see a man getting angry for his own sake if someone insults him, but not getting angry for the sake of Allah's religion if anybody insults it; at most, we may see him feebly defending it in an embarrassed manner.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) often used to forgive those who made mistakes in their interactions with him, especially the hard-hearted Bedouin, in order to soften their hearts. Al-Bukhaari (may Allah have mercy on him) reported in his *Saheeh* that Anas ibn Maalik said:

> *"I was walking with the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and he was wearing a Najraani cloak with a stiff collar. A Bedouin accosted him, grabbing his cloak in such a manner that the collar left a mark on the Prophet's neck, and said, 'O Muhammad! Give me some of the wealth of Allah that you have!' The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) turned to him and smiled, then ordered that he should be given something." (al-Fath, 5809).*

But if the mistake had to do with some issue of religion, then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would become angry for the sake of Allah. Examples of this will be given below.

There are some other matters which should also be borne in mind when dealing with people's mistakes, such as:

1) Making a distinction between major mistakes and minor mistakes, just as Islam makes a distinction between major sins (*kabaa'ir*) and minor sins (*saghaa'ir*).
2) Making a distinction between a person who has a track record of many good deeds, which will more or less cancel out the significance of his mistake, and a sinner who transgresses against himself (by doing evil deeds). People may put up with actions on the part of the one with the good track record that they will not put up with on the part of others.

3) Making a distinction between the one who makes mistakes repeatedly and the one who is making a mistake for the first time.
4) Making a distinction between the one who frequently makes mistakes and the one who rarely does so.
5) Making a distinction between the one who makes mistakes openly and blatantly, and one who tries to cover up his mistakes
6) Paying attention to cases where a person's adherence to Islam may not be strong and his heart needs to be opened to the religion, so we should not be too harsh with him.
7) Taking into account a person's situation as regards status and authority.
8) The considerations that we have mentioned above do not contradict the fairness and justice referred to earlier.
9) Rebuking a youngster who makes a mistake should be done in a manner appropriate to the child's age.
10) Not occupying oneself with putting the symptoms right whilst neglecting to deal with the cause of the mistake
11) Not exaggerating about the mistake
12) Not going to extremes to prove the mistake happened or trying to force an admission of guilt from the one who made the mistake
13) Allowing enough time for correcting the mistake, especially in the case of one who has been accustomed to doing it for a long time, whilst still following up the matter and continuing to advise and correct
14) Not making the one who makes the mistake feel like an enemy, because the aim is to win people over, not score points against them

Now we will move on to our discussion of the methods used by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when dealing with the mistakes of people, as recorded in the *saheeh* hadiths narrated by the scholars.

The Prophet's Methods of Dealing with People's Mistakes

1. Hastening to deal with people's mistakes and not putting it off. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to hasten to deal with people's mistakes, especially when it was not right for him to delay doing so at the moment when this was needed. His task was to explain the truth to people, teach them to do good, and warn them off from doing evil. So, he hastened to correct people on many occasions, as is seen in the stories of the man who was not doing his salaah properly, the Makhzoomi woman, Ibn al-Latbiyyah, Usaamah, the three who wanted to go to extremes in worship, and others. These stories will be related in the course of this discussion, *in sha Allah*.

   Not hastening to deal with mistakes goes against the interests of Islam and misses out on the opportunity to strike while the iron is hot, as it were.

2. Dealing with mistakes by explaining the ruling (*hukm*). *Jarhad* (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) passed by him when his thigh was uncovered. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said,

   "Cover your thigh, for it is part of the 'awrah." (Sunan At-Tirmidhi, No. 2796. At-Tirmidhi said, this is a hasan hadeeth).

3. Referring people back to Islam when they make mistakes, and pointing out to them the principle that they are breaking. When someone is indulging in a mistake, the Islamic principle is far from their minds and is lost in the clamour of the moment. In such cases reiterating the Islamic principle and announcing it loudly can be an effective way of stopping the person in his tracks and making him wake up from the stupor that has overtaken him. When we look at what happened between the

Muhaajiroon and *Ansaar,* because of the flames of *fitnah* stirred up by the munaafiqoon, we will see an example of how the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used this tactic. Al-Bukhaari (may Allah have mercy on him) reported in his *Saheeh* that Jaabir (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

"We went out on a military campaign with the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and some of the muhaajiroon went with him too, and they were very many. Among the muhaajiroon was a man who was very playful (a joker). He shoved an Ansaari (in jest), and the Ansaari got very angry with him and called others to support him, saying, 'O Ansaar!' The Muhaajir called out, 'O Muhaajireen!' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came out and said, 'What is this call of the people of Jaahiliyyah all about?' Then he said, 'What is the matter with him?' He was told about how the Muhaajir had shoved the Ansaari in jest. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Leave it, for it (tribalism) is evil.' " (Al-Fath, 3518).

According to a report narrated by Muslim, he said:

"Let a man help his brother whether he is a wrongdoer or the victim of wrongdoing. If he is a wrongdoer, he should stop him, and if he is the victim of wrongdoing, he should come to his aid." (Saheeh Muslim, no. 2584).

4. Dealing with mistakes by repeatedly reminding people to fear Allah

Jundub ibn 'Abd-Allah al-Bajali reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) sent a group of Muslims to fight some mushrikeen, and they met in battle. One of the mushrikeen was ambushing individual Muslims and killing them. One of the Muslims wanted to catch him out and kill him. [Jundub said:]

"We used to think that that man was Usaamah ibn Zayd. When he raised his sword, the mushrik said 'La ilaaha ill-Allah,' but he [Usaamah] killed him. A messenger came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and reported to him about what had happened in the battle. When he told him about what had happened to the mushrik who said Laa ilaaha illAllah, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) sent for Usaamah and asked him,

> *'Why did you kill him?' He said, 'O Messenger of Allah, he had caused much grief to the Muslims, he killed So-and-so and So-and-so,' – and he named a number of people – 'I attacked him and when he saw the sword he said Laa ilaaha ill-Allah.' The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'And then you killed him?' Usaamah said, 'Yes.' He said, 'What will you do when Laa illaha ill-Allah comes on the Day of Resurrection?' He said, 'O Messenger of Allah, pray for forgiveness for me.'" The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) simply said, "What will you do when Laa ilaaha ill-Allah comes on the Day of Resurrection?" He did not say any more than that. (Reported by Muslim, 'Abd al-Baaqi edition, No. 97).*

One issue that may be included under the heading of reminders is reminding people about the power of Allah. An example of this follows:

Muslim (may Allah have mercy on him) reported that Abu Mas'ood al-Badri said:

> *"I was beating a slave of mine with a whip, and I heard a voice behind me saying, 'Listen Abu Mas'ood!' but I did not pay any attention to the voice because I was so angry. When the voice got nearer to me, I realized that it was the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and he was saying, 'Listen Abu Mas'ood, listen Abu Mas'ood!' I dropped the whip*

from my hand (according to another report: the whip fell from my hand out of respect for him). He said, 'Listen Abu Mas'ood, Allah has more power over you than you have over this slave.' I said, 'I will never hit a slave again.'" According to another report he said: "I said, 'O Messenger of Allah, he is free for the sake of Allah.' He said, 'If you did not do this, the Fire of Hell would blow in your face, or the Fire would touch you.' "

According to another report also narrated by Muslim, "the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

'Certainly Allah has more power over you than you have over him.' So he freed him." (Saheeh Muslim, No. 1659)

5. Showing compassion to the one who is making a mistake

This applies in the case of those who deserve compassion, who feel remorse and show that they have repented, as is sometimes the case when people come to ask questions to learn, as in the following story.

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

"Whilst we were sitting with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), a man came to him and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I am doomed!' He said, 'What is the matter with you?' He said, 'I had intercourse with my wife whilst I was fasting.' The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Are you able to set a slave free?' He said, 'No.' He said, 'Can you fast for two consecutive months?' He said, 'No.' He said, 'Do you have the wherewithal to feed sixty poor persons?' He said, 'No.' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said nothing more about the matter for a while, and whilst we were sitting there like that,

a large basket full of dates was brought to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He said, 'Where is the one who was asking?' The man said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take this and give it in charity.' The man said, 'Who is poorer than me, O Messenger of Allah? By Allah, there is no family in Madeenah poorer than mine.' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) smiled until his eyeteeth were visible, then he said, 'Feed your family with it.'" (Reported by al-Bukhaari, Fath, 1936).

This person who had made a mistake and came to ask about it was not joking or taking the matter lightly. He felt remorseful and guilty, as is clear from his saying "I am doomed." For this reason, he deserved pity and compassion.

6. Not hastening to tell someone he is wrong

Something happened to 'Umar which he himself told about: "I heard Hishaam ibn Hakeem ibn Hizaam reciting Soorat al-Furqaan during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). I listened to his recitation, and he was reciting it differently to the way that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to recite it. I nearly interrupted his prayer, but I waited until he had said the salaam, then I grabbed him by his cloak and said, 'Who taught you to recite this Soorah I heard you reciting?' He said, 'The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught me to recite it.' I said, 'You are lying! The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught me to recite it differently.' I took him to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said, 'I heard him reciting Soorat al-Furqaan differently than the way you taught me to recite it.' The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said,

'Let him go. Recite, O Hishaam.' He recited it as I had heard him recite it. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'This is how it was revealed.' Then he said, 'Recite, O 'Umar.' So, I recited it as he had taught me. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'This is how it was revealed. This Qur'an was revealed with seven ways of recitation, so recite it in the way that is easiest for you.'" (Reported by al-Bukhaari, al-Fath, 4992).

Among the educational methods we learn from this story are the following:

- Telling each one to recite in front of the other and approving their recitation was more effective in confirming that both were correct and neither was wrong.
- When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told 'Umar to let go of Hishaam, this was preparing both parties to listen in a calm manner. This was an indication that 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) had been too hasty.
- A person who is seeking knowledge should not be too hasty to condemn any opinion that differs from that with which he is familiar; he should first be sure of what he is saying, because that opinion may turn out to be a valid scholarly opinion.

Another relevant point is that one should not hasten to punish someone who makes a mistake, as we see in the following story:

An-Nisaa`i (may Allah have mercy on him) reported from 'Abbaad ibn Sharhabeel (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: "I came with my (paternal) uncles to Madeenah, and we entered one of the gardens of the city. I rubbed some of the wheat, and the owner of the garden came and took my cloak and hit me. I came to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asking for his help. He sent for that man and they

brought him to him. He said to him, 'What made you do that?' He said, 'O Messenger of Allah, he went into my garden and took some of my wheat and rubbed it.' The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'You did not teach him if it was the matter of him not knowing, and you did not feed him if it was the matter of him being hungry. Give him back his cloak.' And the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ordered that I should be given a wasq or half a wasq (measure of wheat)." (Al-Nisaa`i, al-Mujtabaa, Kitaab Aadaab al-Qudaat, Baab al-Isti'daa'; Saheeh Sunan al-Nisaa`i, no. 4999).

From this story we learn that we should find out the circumstances of the one who is making a mistake or acting in an aggressive manner, so that we may know the right way to deal with him.

We may also note that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not punish the owner of the garden, because he was in the right, but he had handled the matter wrong. He pointed out to him that the way he had dealt with someone who knew not better was inappropriate in such circumstances, then he taught him how to handle the matter properly, and told him to give back the garment he had taken from the hungry man.

7. Remaining calm when dealing with people's mistakes - especially when being too harsh could make matters worse and do more harm than good. We can learn this from looking at how the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) dealt with the mistake made by the Bedouin who urinated in the mosque, as was reported by Anas ibn Maalik, who said:

> *"Whilst we were in the mosque with the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), a Bedouin came and stood urinating in the mosque. The Companions of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Stop it! Stop it!' But the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Do not interrupt him; leave him alone.' So they left him until he had finished urinating, then the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) called him and said to him, 'In these mosques it is not right to do anything like urinating or defecating; they are only for remembering Allah, praying and reading Qur`an,' or words to that effect. Then he commanded a man who was there to bring a bucket of water and throw it over the (urine), and he did so." (Saheeh Muslim, no. 285).*

The principle which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) followed in dealing with this mistake was to treat the man gently, not to be harsh with him. Al-Bukhaari reported from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him):

> *"A Bedouin urinated in the mosque, and the people got up to sort him out. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to them, 'Leave him alone, and throw a bucket of water over it. You have been sent to make things easy for people, not to make things hard.'" (Fath, 6128).*

The Sahaabah, may Allah be pleased with them, were very keen to denounce the bad thing they had seen and to keep their mosque clean and pure, as is indicated in the various reports of this hadeeth, which describe them as shouting at him, getting up to sort him out, rebuking him and hastening to deal with him, or telling him to "Stop it!"[4]

[4] Jaami' al-Usool, 7/83-87

But the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was thinking of the likely consequences of the two options – stopping him or leaving him alone. If they tried to stop him, forcing a man to suppress his urination could do him harm, and if he was unable to stop but moved away because he was afraid of them, the impurity would be spread over a wider area of the mosque and on the man's body and clothing. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had the farsightedness to see that leaving the man alone until he had finished urinating was the lesser of two evils, especially since the man had already started doing it, and it was a problem that they would be able to do something about by cleaning it afterwards. So, he told his companions to leave him alone and not to interrupt him. He told them to leave him alone because this was in the better interests of all and would ward off a worse evil by putting up with the lesser evil.

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) mentioned in his commentary a number of things we learn from the hadeeth about the Bedouin, among which are the following:

- We should be gentle when dealing with one who is ignorant and teach him what he needs to know without rebuking him, so long as he is not acting out of stubbornness, especially if he is one who needs to be won over.
- The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was kind and dealt nicely with him.
- The idea of taking precautions against impurity (*najaasah*) was well-established in the minds of the Sahaabah, which is why they hastened to denounce it in the presence of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) without first asking his permission. The idea of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil was also well-established in their minds.

We should also hasten to remove anything objectionable when there is nothing to stop us from doing so, because when the man had finished urinating, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) issued instructions that the place should be cleaned with water.

8. Explaining the harmful effects of a mistake

Explaining bad effects and negative consequences is very important when it comes to convincing people that they are making a mistake. The consequences may affect the person himself, or they may spread to other people. An example of the former is the report narrated by Abu Dawood (may Allah have mercy on him) in his Sunan from Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with them both), in which a man cursed the wind. Muslim said that a man's cloak was snatched away by the wind at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and he cursed the wind. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said,

> *"Do not curse it, for it only does as it is commanded, and if a person curses something that does not deserve to be cursed, his curse will come back upon him." (Abu Dawood, No. 4908; Saheeh Abi Dawood, No. 4102).*

According to a report narrated by al-Bukhaari in al-Adab al-Mufrad, Mihjan al-Aslami (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

> *"… until when we were in the mosque, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saw a man praying, prostrating and bowing. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to me, 'Who is this?' I started to praise him and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, this is so-and-so, and he is such-and-such.' (According to another report also in*

al-Adab al-Mufrad, he said, 'This is so-and-so and he is one of the best people in Madeenah in prayer.') He said, 'Be quiet, lest he hear you and you destroy him.'" (Saheeh al-Adab al-Mufrad, 137; al-Albaani said, it is hasan).

Al-Bukhaari reported that Abu Moosa (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

"The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) heard a man praising another man and going to extremes in that. He said, 'You have destroyed him' or 'You have broken the man's back.'" (Fath 2663).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained that exaggeration when praising someone is a mistake which can have bad consequences. It may make the person who is praised feel proud, so that his heart is filled with arrogance and self-admiration, and he rests on his laurels or starts to show off because he enjoys the praise so much. This in turn may lead to his utimate doom, which is what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) meant when he said, ***"You have destroyed him,"*** or ***"You have cut the man's throat,"*** or

"You have broken the man's back."

Moreover, if a person goes to extremes in praising someone, and says something he is not certain of, or affirms something he could not possibly know, or maybe even tells lies or says something to please the person he is praising, this will be a disaster, especially if the person he is praising is an oppressor or wrongdoer[5].

Some of the salaf said: "If a man is praised to his face, let him say: 'O Allah, forgive me for what they do not know, do not hold me responsible for what they say, and make me better than what they think."[6]

[5] See al-Fath, 10/478
[6] Fath, 10/478

9. Offering a sound alternative

'Abd-Allah ibn Mas'ood said, "When we prayed with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), we used to say, "Peace be upon Allah from His slaves, peace be upon so-and-so."[7] The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said,

> *"Do not say, 'Peace be upon Allah,' for Allah is 'The Peace' (al-Salaam). But you should say, 'At-Tahiyyaatu Lillaahi wa'l-salawaatu wa'l-tayyibaat, al-salaamu 'alayka ayyuha'l-Nabiyyu wa rahmatAllahi wa barakaatuhu, wa'l-salaamu 'alaynaa wa 'alaa 'ibaad-Illaah il-saaliheen.' If you say this, it will include every slave of Allah in heaven or between heaven and earth. [Then say:] 'I bear witness that there is no god except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.' Then choose whichever du'aa' you like, and recite it." (al-Bukhaari, Fath, 835).*

But in the case of some *da'iyahs* and people who seek to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, we notice that there is a shortcoming in their methods when they denounce some of the mistakes that people make. They only point out the mistakes and denounce them as *haraam*, without offering an alternative or explaining what must be done if one makes a mistake. It is known that the method of Islam is to offer alternatives to make up for any benefits that may have been gained through the *haraam* practice. When *zinaa* (fornication, adultery) was forbidden, marriage was allowed and prescribed; when ribaa (usury, interest) was forbidden, trading was allowed; when pork, dead meat and the flesh of every creature that has fangs or talons

[7] According to a report narrated by al-Nisaa`i, he said, "Peace be upon Jibreel, peace be upon Mikaa'eel." Al-Mujtabaa: Kitaab al-Tatbeeq, Baab Kayfa alTashahhud al-Awwal. See also Saheeh Sunan al-Nisaa`i, no. 1119.

were forbidden, the meat of properly-slaughtered cattle and other animals was allowed, and so on. If a person does fall into error, Islam shows him the way out, through repentance and expiation, as is explained in the texts on kafaaraat (acts of expiation). So those who seek to call others to Islam must follow the sharee'ah in offering alternatives and finding acceptable ways out. (Another example of offering an alternative is to quote saheeh ahaadeeth which will replace da'eef and fabricated ahaadeeth).

It is worth pointing out here that offering alternatives is something that depends on what is possible. Sometimes a mistake may be something that has to be stopped, but there is no realistic alternative, either because the general situation is bad and people are far removed from the sharee'ah of Allah, or because the one who is seeking to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil cannot remember what the alternative is – all he wants to do is denounce the mistake and change it, even if he has no alternative to offer.

10. Not confronting people directly with their mistakes and addressing the issue in general terms may be sufficient.

When 'Aa`ishah wanted to buy a slave-woman whose name was Bareerah, her owners refused to sell her except with the condition that she would still be connected to them. When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) found out about this, he stood up to address the people, praised and thanked Allah, then said,

"What is wrong with men who impose conditions which are not mentioned in the Book of Allah? There is no condition that is not mentioned in the Book of Allah but it is invalid, even if there were one hundred such conditions. The

decree of Allah is more true, the conditions laid down by Allah are more binding, and wala' (connection, loyalty, allegiance) is to the one who sets the slave free." (Reported by al-Bukhaari (may Allah have mercy on him) in numerous places in his Saheeh. See Fath, 5636).

There are many examples, all of which indicate that the identity of the person who has made the mistake need not be exposed. This indirect approach and avoiding a direct confrontation has a number of benefits, including the following:

1. It avoids a negative reaction on the part of the person who has made the mistake, and prevents him from being tempted by the Shaytaan to avenge himself or defend himself.
2. It is more acceptable to people and is more effective.
3. It conceals the person's mistake in front of other people.
4. It increases the status of the educator and makes the advisor more beloved.

It must be pointed out that this method of using hints to convey a ruling to a person who has made a mistake, without exposing him and causing him embarrassment, is only to be used when what he has done is not known to the majority of people. If most of the people do know what he has done, and he knows that they know, then this method would be more in the nature of a rebuke and scolding, and exposing him in the most hurtful manner. The one who has made a mistake would most likely rather be confronted directly than be dealt with in this manner. Among the factors that can make a difference are: who is giving the advice, in the presence of whom the advice is being given, and whether the advice is given in a provocative and aggressive manner, or in a kindly and gentle manner.

Indirect methods of teaching people may be of benefit to the one who has made the mistake and to others, if they are used wisely.

11. Provoking public opinion against the one who has made the mistake

This method is only to be used in very limited circumstances, when a great deal of thought has been given to the matter, to avoid any negative escalation of the situation. There follows an example of how the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used this method. Abu Hurayrah said:

> *"A man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and complained to him about his neighbour. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Go and put up with him.' The man came back two or three times, then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Go and put your belongings out in the street.' So he went and put his belongings out in the street. People started to ask him what was going on, so he told them, and the people started to curse (the neighbour), saying, 'May Allah do such-and-such to him.' Then the neighbour came to him and said, 'Put your stuff back, you will not see anything else from me that you dislike.'" (Reported by Abu Dawood, Kitaab al-Adab, Baab fi Haqq al-Jiwaar, No. 5153; Saheeh Abi Dawood, 4292).*

This method has an opposite counterpart which is used in other circumstances to protect people from the public's harm, as will be explained below:

12. Avoiding helping the shaytan against the one who is making a mistake

'Umar ibn al-Khattaab reported that at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), there was a man called 'Abd-Allah whose nickname was Himaar (donkey), who used to make the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be

upon him) laugh. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had him whipped for drinking – he was brought to him one day and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave orders that he should be whipped. One of the men present said, "O Allah, curse him! How often has he been brought [to be punished because of drinking]!" The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said,

> *"Do not curse him, for by Allah, all I know of him is that he loves Allah and His Messenger." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, Fath, 6780).*

According to another report:

> *"Then the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to his Companions, 'Rebuke him.' So they turned to him and said, 'You did not think of Allah, you did not fear Allah, you did not feel ashamed before the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).' Then they let him go, and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Say, "O Allah, forgive him, O Allah, have mercy on him"' and some of them added similar sentiments." (Abu Dawood, Kitaab al-Hudood, Baab al-Hadd fi'lKhamr, no. 4478, 4/620. Classed as saheeh by alAlbaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood, no. 3759).*

According to another report:

> *"When he went away, some of the people said, 'May Allah put you to shame!' The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Do not speak like this, do not help the Shaytaan against him. Say "May Allah have mercy on you."'" (Reported by Ahmad, 2/300. Ahmad Shaakir said, its isnaad is saheeh. Al-Musnad, ed. by Ahmad Shaakir, No. 7973).*

What we learn from all of these reports is that if the Muslim falls into sin, he is still basically a Muslim and still basically loves Allah and His Messenger, and this should not be denied. It is not permitted to pray against him in a manner that helps the Shaytaan against him; rather we should pray for him and ask Allah to guide him, forgive him and have mercy on him.

13. Asking the person to stop doing the wrong action

It is very important to make the person stop the wrong deed so that it does not get any worse and so that there is no delay in the denunciation of evil. 'Umar reported that he said, "No, by my father." The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said,

"Stop! Whoever swears by something other than Allah, is guilty of shirk." (Reported by Imaam Ahmad, 1/47. Ahmad Shaakir said, its isnaad is saheeh. No. 329)

Abu Dawood reported in his Sunan that 'Abd-Allah ibn Busr (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "A man came stepping over the necks on the people (in the mosque) one Friday, whilst the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was delivering the khutbah. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said,

'Sit down! You are causing a disturbance.'"

These ahaadeeth show a direct request to the person who is making the mistake to stop what he is doing.

14. Explaining to the person who is making a mistake how to put things right

Among the qualities of the educator is that he should be aware of the actions of those who are with him.

i. It is a part of educational wisdom to ask a person who has made a mistake to re-do his action, so that he can notice his mistake and put it right himself, especially when it is an obvious mistake that does not befit him. He may have done it out of forgetfulness, so this will remind him.

ii. If the person who has made a mistake does not realize it, it must be pointed out and explained to him.

iii. Giving information to a person who is interested and has asked about it himself is more effective and is more likely to be remembered than handing it out to someone who has not made any such enquiries.

    a. The methods of teaching are many, and the educator can choose whichever are best suited in any given circumstances.

A third example was narrated by al-Tirmidhi (may Allah have mercy on him) in his Sunan from Kildah ibn Hanbal, who said that Safwaan ibn Umayyah sent him with some milk, yoghurt and daghaabees [an edible plant] to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was at the top of the valley. He said,

> *"I entered upon him, and I did not greet him with salaam or ask permission to enter, so the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Go out and say "Al-salaamu 'alaykum, may I enter?"'" (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, no. 2710. At-Tirmidhi said, a ghareeb hasan hadeeth. The hadeeth is also in Saheeh Sunan al-Tirmidhi, No. 2180).*

- Putting right the consequences of the mistake. *Al-Nisaa`i* (may Allah have mercy on him) reported in his Sunan from 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Amr that a man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said,

"I have come to pledge allegiance to you and to make hijrah (migration) to you. I have left my parents weeping." He said, "Go back to them and make them smile as you made them weep." (Al-Majmaa 7/143. Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Sunan al-Nisaa`i, No. 3881).

- Offering *Kafarah* (expiation) for the mistake

If some mistakes cannot be corrected or reversed, then there are other ways offered by Islam for wiping out their effects. One of these ways is *kafaaraat* or acts of expiation, of which there are many types, such as *kafaarat al-yameen* (expiation for swearing an unfulfilled oath), and expiation for zihaar (a jaahili form of divorce in which one says to one's wife "You are to me as my mother's back"), manslaughter, having intercourse during the day in Ramadaan, and so on.

15. Denouncing only the mistake whilst accepting the rest

It may be the case that not all of what a person says or does is wrong, so it is wise to limit our denunciation only to that which is wrong, and not to generalize by condemning everything that is said or done as being wrong. This is indicated in the report narrated by al-Bukhaari (may Allah have mercy on him) in his Saheeh from al-Rubay' bint Mu'awwadh ibn 'Afraa', who said:

"The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came and entered, and sat down on my bed the way you sat down. Some young girls of ours began beating on the daff (hand-drum) and singing songs eulogizing those of

our forefathers who had been killed at Badr. Then one of them said, 'Among us there is a Prophet who knows the future.' He [the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)] said: 'Do not say that; say what you were saying before.'" (Fath, 5147).

According to a report narrated by Ibn Maajah, he said: "Do not say this; no one knows the future except Allah." (Sunan Ibn Maajah, 'Abd al-Baaqi edition, No. 1879. Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Sunan Ibn Maajah, No. 1539).

There is no doubt that this kind of treatment makes the person feel that the one who is striving to point out mistakes and correct them is fair and just, and this makes him more likely to accept his advice. This is in contrast to some of those who want to denounce errors, but get so angry with the mistake committed that they go to extremes in their denunciation and condemn everything done and said by the one who has made the mistake, good and bad alike. This makes the person reject what they say and refuse to follow their advice.

16. Restoring rights and preserving positions

'What stopped you from giving him his booty?' Khaalid said, 'I thought it was too much, O Messenger of Allah.' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, 'Give it to him.' Then Khaalid passed by 'Awf, who pulled his cloak and said, 'Did I not do what I told you I would do with regard to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)?' The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) heard him and got angry, and said, 'Do not give it to him, O Khaalid! Do not give it to him, O Khaalid! Why do you not leave my commanders alone? The

likeness of you and them is that of a man who is asked to take care of camels or sheep, so he takes care of them, then when it is time for them to drink, he takes them to a trough and they start to drink, and they drink the clean water and leave the dregs behind. You take the clean water and leave the dregs for them [the commanders].'" (Muslim *bi Sharh* An-Nawawi, 12/64).

We may note here that when Khaalid made a mistake in his decision (ijtihaad) to withhold the large amount of booty from the killer, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) commanded that the matter should be put right by giving the booty to its rightful owner, but he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) got angry when he heard 'Awf (may Allah be pleased with him) making insinuations about Khaalid and poking fun at him by saying,

> *"Did I not do what I told you I would do with regard to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)?" and pulling on Khaalid's cloak when he walked past him, so he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Do not give it to him, O Khaalid."*

This was for the purpose of reinstating and reinforcing the position of the commander and leader, because upholding the leader's position in front of the people serves an obvious purpose.

Further evidence concerning restoration of the position of the person who has been wronged comes in the report narrated in the Musnad of Imaam Ahmad from Abu Tufayl 'Aamir ibn Waathilah, that a man passed by a group of people and greeted them with salaam, and they returned the greeting, but when he had gone, one of them said, "By Allah, I hate this man for the sake of Allah." The others present said, "What a bad thing to say! By Allah, we are going to tell him. Get up, O So-and-So – one of the people

present – and tell him." So, their messenger caught up with him and told him what had been said. The man went to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said, "O Messenger of Allah, I passed by a group of Muslims among whom was So-and-So. I greeted them with salaam and they returned the greeting, and when I had left, one of them caught up with me and told me that So-and-So had said, 'By Allah, I hate this man for the sake of Allah.' Call him and ask him why he hates me." So, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) called him and asked him about what the man had said. He admitted it and said, "I did say that, O Messenger of Allah." The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said,

> *"Why do you hate him?" He said, "I am his neighbour and I know him very well. By Allah, I have never seen him pray any prayer except the prescribed prayer which everyone, good and bad alike, prays." The man said, "Ask him, O Messenger of Allah, has he ever seen me delaying any prayer, or not doing wudoo' properly, or not doing rukoo' and sujood properly?" He said, "No," then he said, "By Allah, I have never seen him fast at all except this month which everyone, good and bad alike, fasts." He said, "O Messenger of Allah, has he ever seen me breaking my fast during [that month], or doing anything to invalidate my fast?" The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked him, and he said, "No," then he said, "By Allah, I have never seen him giving to any needy person or spending any of his wealth for the sake of Allah except for this charity [zakaah] which everyone, good and bad alike, gives." He said, "Ask him, O Messenger of Allah, have I ever withheld any part of the zakaah or kept it back from the one who asked for it?" The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked*

him and he said, "No." The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "I don't know, maybe he is better than you."

It is very important to maintain a person's position after he has repented from his mistake and set matters straight, so that he will remain on the right path and live a normal life among people. It was reported in the story of the Makhzoomi woman who had her hand cut off (for stealing), which was reported by 'Aa`ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), that "she repented properly later on, and she got married and used to come to me and I would tell the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon her) what she needed."[8]

17. Addressing both parties in cases where the blame is shared

In many cases, the blame is shared and the person who makes a mistake may himself have been wronged, but the blame is not to be shared equally. In this case both parties must be addressed and advised. There follows an example. 'Abd-Allah ibn Abi Awfaa said: "'Abd al-Rahmaan ibn 'Awf complained about Khaalid ibn al-Waleed to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

'Do not upset any of those who were present at Badr, for even if you were to spend gold equal to the size of Uhud, your deeds would not equal theirs.' He said, 'They insulted me first, and I responded.' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'Do not upset Khaalid, for he is one of the swords of Allah sent against the kuffaar.'" (AlHaythami said: the men of

[8] Saheeh Muslim, No. 1688.

al-Tabaraani are thiqaat. Al-Majma', 9/349. See also al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer by al-Tabaraani, hadeeth no. 3801).

18. Intervening to calm people down and put a stop to the *fitnah* (discord) between those who are making mistakes

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went to Bani 'Amr ibn 'Awf to reconcile between them, and stayed there for that purpose until the time for one of the congregational prayers came, as is reported in alSaheehayn and in a report narrated by al-Nisaa`i. Sahl ibn Sa'd al-Saa'idi (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "A dispute arose between two parties among the Ansaar, to the point that they were throwing stones at one another. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went to reconcile between them, and the time for prayer came, so Bilaal called the Adhaan and waited for the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), but he did not come. So, he made the iqaamah (call immediately preceding congregational prayer) and Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him) led the prayer…"[9] According to a report narrated by Ahmad, Sahl ibn Sa'd al-Saa'idi said: "Someone came to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said: 'Bani 'Amr ibn 'Awf are fighting and throwing stones at one another.' So, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went out to them to reconcile between them…"[10]

19. Showing one's anger about a mistake

According to Ibn Abi 'Aasim in Kitaab al-Sunnah:

[9] Al-Mujtabaa, Kitaab Aadaab alQadaah, 8/243.
[10] Al-Musnad, 5/338.

"The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came out to his Companions, and they were disputing about al-qadar, one quoting one aayah and another quoting another aayah. It was as if a pomegranate seed had been thrown in his face [because it was red with anger]. He said, 'Is this what you were created for? Is this what you were ordered to do? Do not use parts of Allah's book against other parts. Look at what you are commanded to do, and do it, and what you are forbidden to do, avoid it.'" (Al-Sunnah by Ibn Abi 'Aasim, edited by al-Albaani, No. 406. He said: its isnaad is hasan).

An example of the Prophet's anger when he heard a mistake that led to wrongdoing was also reported by al-Bukhaari, from Abu Mas'ood al-Ansaari, who said: "A man came to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I am going to go late to the prayer tomorrow because of so-and-so, who makes the prayer too long for us.' I never saw the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) angrier in his rebuking than on that day, when he said,

'O people! Some of you are putting others off. When any of you leads the people in prayer, let him keep it short, for among them are the elderly, the weak and those with pressing needs.'" (Fath, 7159).

The educator may show anger in proportion to the mistake at the time when the mistake is made, or when he sees or hears it, in such a way that the anger may be seen in his face or recognized from his tone of voice. This is a sign that his heart is alert to wrongdoing and will not keep silent about it, so that the others present will feel afraid of making the same mistake. Speaking out when you are angry can have a greater impact than remaining silent and waiting until things have cooled down, because then the impact of your comments will be lost.

On the other hand, it may be wise to delay commenting on a regrettable incident or seriously mistaken words until all the people have been called together or until a time when they meet, because of the seriousness of what is involved or because there are not enough people around to understand and convey the information to others. There is nothing wrong with addressing an individual immediately and delaying general discussion of the matter until later. According to Saheeh al-Bukhaari, Abu Humayd al-Saa'idi reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) appointed someone (to collect the zakaah). When he had finished his work, he came and said,

> *"O Messenger of Allah, this is for you, and this is what was given to me as a gift." He said, "Why don't you sit in your parents' house and see whether anyone brings you a gift or not?" In the evening, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stood up after the prayer, pronounced the Shahaadah and praised Allah as He deserves to be praised, then he said, "What is wrong with an employee whom we appoint, then he comes to us and says, 'This is for you and this is what I was given as a gift"? Why does he not sit in his parents' house and see whether anyone brings him a gift or not? By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, no one of you unlawfully withholds something from us, except he will come on the Day of Judgement carrying it around his neck: if it is a camel, he will bring it bellowing, if it is a cow he will bring it mooing, and if it is a sheep he will bring it bleating. I have conveyed (the message)." Abu Humayd added, "Then the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) raised his arm so high that we could see his armpit." (Fath, 6636)*

20. Turning away from the one who has made a mistake, and avoiding argument with him, in the hope that he may come back to the right way

Al-Bukhaari (may Allah have mercy on him) reported that 'Ali ibn Abi Taalib (may Allah be pleased with him) said that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came to him and Faatimah's (peace be upon her, the daughter of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) one night and said to them,

> *"Are you not praying?" 'Ali said, "O Messenger of Allah, our souls are in the hand of Allah. If He wants to bring us back to life (from sleep), He will do so!" The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went away when 'Ali said that to him, and he did not respond to it at all, but 'Ali heard him as he was walking away, slapping his thigh and saying, "'…But, man is ever more quarrelsome than anything.' [al-Kahf 18:54 – interpretation of the meaning]." (The words of 'Ali could be understood in different ways. See al-Fath, 7347).*

21. Rebuking the one who has made a mistake

This is what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did with Haatib (may Allah be pleased with him) when he heard that he had sent word to the *kuffaar* of Quraysh, informing them of the Muslims' intention to head for Makkah to conquer it. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked him,

> *"What made you do that, O Haatib?" He said, "I believe in Allah and His Messenger and I never changed, but I wanted to make some gesture towards them through which Allah might protect my family and my wealth. All your*

other companions have someone there through whom Allah will protect their families and their wealth." [The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)] said: "He has spoken the truth, so do not say anything but good to him." 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab said, "But he has betrayed Allah and Messenger and the believers! Let me strike his neck [cut off his head]!" [The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)] said: "How do you know? Maybe Allah looked at the people of Badr and said, 'Do what you like, for Paradise is guaranteed for you.'" Tears welled up in 'Umar's eyes and he said, "Allah and His Messenger know best." (Fath, 6259)

There are a number of important educational points we learn from this story:

i. – The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) rebuked the Sahaabi who had made a serious mistake by asking him, "What made you do that?"

ii. – Enquiring as to the reason that motivated him to make the mistake undoubtedly has an effect on the way in which he is treated.

iii. – Those who have an excellent track record are not immune from committing major sins.

iv. – The educator must be open-minded in dealing with his companions' mistakes so that they continue progressing on the straight path. The aim is to reform them, not alienate them.

v. – The educator must appreciate the moments of human weakness that may overcome some of those who are with him, and he should not be shocked by a serious mistake on the part of one who is advanced or senior.

vi. – Defending one who deserves to be defended even though he has made a mistake.

vii. – If a person who makes a mistake has a great deal of good works to his credit, this should be taken into account when evaluating the level of his mistake and dealing with it.

22. Boycotting the one who has made a mistake

This is one of the effective methods used by the Prophet (ρ) especially when a very serious mistake was made, because of the far-reaching effect that a boycott has on the person concerned.

Another indication that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used this method was narrated by al-Tirmidhi from 'Aa`ishah, who said: "No behaviour was more hateful to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) than lying. If a man told lies in the presence of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he would remain upset about it until he knew that he had repented from that."[11]

According to another report: "If it happened that one of the members of his household told a lie, he would keep turning away from him until he repented."[12]

It is clear from the reports mentioned above that turning away from the person who is making a mistake until he gives it up is an effective educational method, but in order for it to be effective, the person who is forsaking and turning away from the other must have some status in the eyes of the latter, otherwise it will not have a positive effect, and may even give the person something to be happy about.

[11] Abu 'Eesa said: this is a hasan hadeeth. Sunan al-Tirmidhi, No. 1973.
[12] Reported by al-Haakim. Saheeh al-Jaami', 4675.

23. Meeting with the person who has made a mistake to talk it over

A report narrated by Ahmad describes the matter more clearly and contains important lessons: 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Amr said: "My father married me to a woman from Quraysh. When she entered upon me, I did not approach her because I was so enthusiastic about worshipping Allah by fasting and praying. 'Amr ibn al-'Aas came to his daughter in law and asked her, 'How do you find your husband?' She said, 'He is the best of men, or he is like the best of husbands among men. He has never disturbed us and he has never slept in our bed.' So, he came to me and told me off.[13] He said, 'I married you to a woman from a good family of Quraysh, and you are neglecting her (i.e., not treating her as a wife) and you are doing such and such.' Then he went to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and complained about me. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) sent for me and I came to him. He said to me,

> *'Do you fast during the day?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Do you pray (qiyaam) at night?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'But I fast and I break my fast, I pray and I sleep, and I go to my wives. Whoever turns away from my Sunnah has nothing to do with me.' He said, 'Read the Qur'an once a month.' I said, 'I can do more than that.' He said, 'Read it once every ten days.' I said, 'I can do more than that.' One of them – either Husayn or Mugheerah – said, 'Read it every three days.' He [the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)] said: 'Fast three days of every month.' I said, 'I can do more than that.' He kept increasing the number until he said, 'Fast one day and do not fast the next day. This is the best of fasts, the fast of my brother Dawood.'*

[13] Ibn al-Atheer said: … according to another hadeeth, 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas said: 'So my father came to me and told me off.' Al-Nihaayah 3/200.

Husayn said in his narration of the hadeeth: then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

> *'Every worshipper has a time when he is motivated and keen, and after every such time comes a time of slackening, where he either follows the Sunnah or follows bid'ah. The one whose slackening follows Sunnah is guided, but the one whose slackening follows bid'ah is doomed.'"*

Mujaahid said: "When 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Amr grew old and weak, he would fast for several days at a time, so that he could grow stronger, then he would break his fast for a similar number of days. He would read his portion of the Qur'an in like manner, sometimes reading more, sometimes reading less, so that he would finish the entire Qur'an in seven days or in three days. After that he would say, 'I wish that I had accepted the dispensation of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), for it would be better for me than what I chose for myself, or I left him saying that I would do something and I would hate to do something else.'"[14]

Among the things we learn from this story are:

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) understood the cause of the problem, which was that ['Abd-Allah ibn 'Amr] was exhausting himself in worship to the point that he did not have time to take care of his duties towards his wife, so he was falling short.

The principle of paying due attention to everyone who has rights over one applies to anyone who is preoccupied with matters of worship, such as a student who is giving so many lessons, or a daa'iyah who is so busy with his da'wah that his wife complains

[14] *Al-Musnad*, 2/158. Ahmad Shaakir said: its *isnaad* is *saheeh. Tahqeeq al-Musnad*, No. 6477.

of mistreatment. This can lead to a loss of balance in carrying out different acts of worship and dividing one's time among all those who are making rightful claims on it. So, there is nothing wrong with the teacher reducing the number of lessons he gives, or the daa'iyah reducing his activities so as to allow himself enough time to take care of his home, wife and children, and give them their rights as regards guidance, companionship and education.

24. Speaking bluntly to a person about the mistake he made

Al-Bukhaari (may Allah have mercy on him) reported that Abu Dharr said: "There was an argument between me and another man. His mother was a non-Arab, and I said something insulting about her. He mentioned this to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who asked me,

> *'Did you trade insults with so-and-so?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Did you say something insulting about his mother?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'You are a man who still has something of jaahiliyyah in you.' I said, 'I said what I said because I am getting old.' He said, 'Yes, but they are your brothers. Allah has given you power over them, but whoever is given power over someone, let him feed him as he feeds himself, clothe him as he clothes himself, and not give him more work to do than he is able. If he does give him too much work, let him help him.'" (Fath, 6050)*

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) spoke in this straightforward and open manner to Abu Dharr because he knew he would accept it. Such a blunt approach can be a useful method that saves times and energy, and gets

the point across in the easiest manner, but it should only be done when it is appropriate to the situation and the people involved.

This direct approach may be better not used if it will lead to something worse or if it means that a greater interest will not be achieved, for example if the person making the mistake is in a position of power and authority and would not accept such frank comments, or if a direct approach would cause too much embarrassment to the person who is doing wrong. It should also not be used if the person is extra sensitive and is likely to react badly. Undoubtedly a direct approach will be too much for a person to take if it is made in a spirit of confrontation and with the aim of causing embarrassment and showing him up at the time when his critic appears superior. Generally speaking, people differ when it comes to accepting advice, and the right approach will differ in each case, but a good attitude in discussing mistakes and guiding people will also have the greatest effect in achieving the desired goal.

25. Persuading a person that he is making a mistake

Engaging in a discussion with a wrongdoer with the aim of convincing him may lead to the removal of the blinds over his eyes and bringing him back to the Straight Path. An example of this is the report narrated by al-Tabaraani (may Allah have mercy on him) in al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer from Abu Umaamah (may Allah have mercy on him), who said that a young man came to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said,

> *"O Messenger of Allah, give me permission to commit zinaa (fornication or adultery)." The people shouted [at him] and [the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)] said, "Stop it!' The Messenger of Allah (peace*

and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Let him calm down. Come here." He came and sat in front of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who said to him, "Would you like it for your mother?" He said, "No." He said, "Likewise, people do not like it for their mothers. Would you like it for your daughter?" He said, "No." He said, "Likewise, people do not like it for their daughters. Would you like it for your sister?" He said, "No." He said, "Likewise, people do not like it for their sisters. Would you like it for your (paternal) aunt?" He said, "No." He said, "Likewise, people do not like it for their (paternal) aunts. Would you like it for your (maternal) aunt?" He said, "No." He said, "Likewise, people do not like it for their (maternal) aunts." Then the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) put his hand on his chest and said, "O Allah, forgive his sins, purify his heart and make him chaste." (Al-Tabaraani, al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer, 7679 and 7759. Additional material is included between square brackets).

26. Making a person understand that his flimsy excuse is not acceptable.

Some people who make mistakes try to offer made-up, unacceptable excuses, especially when they are caught red-handed. Indeed, some of them may appear to be stammering when they give their flimsy excuses, especially those who are not good at lying because they are basically good at heart. How should the educator act when he comes across a situation like this? The following story demonstrates the brilliant attitude of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when dealing with one of his Companions in a situation of this nature. The story also shows us how the educator should persistently follow up until the person gives up his wrong attitude.

Khuwwaat ibn Jubayr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "We made camp with the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) at Mar al-Zahraan (a place near Makkah). I came out of my tent and saw some women talking amongst themselves. I liked them, so I went back, got out my trunk and took out a hillah (a suit of clothes). I put it on and came and sat with them. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came out and said, 'O Abu 'Abd-Allah!!" (i.e., he was reprimanding him for sitting with those non-mahrem women). When I saw the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), I got scared and started stammering (trying to come up with an excuse). I said, "O Messenger of Allah, my camel got lost and I am looking for a rope to restrain it" (i.e., he came up with a false excuse to justify what he had done). He left, and I followed him. He threw his cloak at me and went in among some araak trees – and it is as if I can see the whiteness of his back against the greenness of the araak trees. He answered the call of nature and did wudoo', and turned (to me) with the water dripping from his beard onto his chest, and said: "O Abu 'Abd-Allah, what happened to your lost camel?" Then we continued on our journey, and whenever he caught up with me, he would say, "Assalaamu aleika Abu 'Abd-Allah. What happened to that lost camel?" When I realized this, I hastened on to Madeenah and avoided the mosque and gatherings where the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was present. When this had gone on for a long time, I tried to go to the mosque when no one else was around. I went to the mosque and started to pray, but the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came out of one of his apartments and started to pray two short rak'ahs. I made my prayer long, hoping that he

would go away and leave me. He said, 'Make it as long as you like, O Abu 'Abd-Allah, for I am not leaving until you finish.' I said to myself, 'By Allah, I should apologize to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and make him happy.' When I had finished, he said, 'Al-salaamu 'alayka, O Abu 'Abd-Allah. What happened to your lost camel?' I said, 'By the One Who sent you with the truth, that camel has never gotten lost since the time I became a Muslim.' He said, 'May Allah have mercy on you' three times, then he never mentioned it again."

This is a brilliant study in training and the use of wise strategies to achieve the desired result. We may also learn the following points from this story:

1. A person who has committed a sin will feel shy of a respected leader when he catches him out.
2. The way the educator looks at and questions a person – even though it may be very brief – will have a great impact on him.
3. Not discussing a false excuse at the time of hearing it – even though it is clearly made up – and turning away from the person may be enough to make him realize that his excuse is not acceptable, which will motivate him to repent and apologize. This is what we understand from the phrase "he left."
4. The good educator is the one who makes the person who has made a mistake feel too shy of him, so that he tries to hide away from him, but at the same time, his need for him makes him want to come to him. Then the latter takes precedence over the former.
5. The change of attitude towards the wrongdoer is based – in this case – on the wrongdoer's admission that he was wrong and his giving up the thing he had done.

If the educator or leader is held in high esteem by his companions, then if he rebukes one of them or tells him that he has made a mistake, this will have an effect on him. The leader should pay attention to the interests of others when rebuking one of his companions, so that all may benefit from it. However, this should not mean that he should ignore any negative effect on that particular individual. That can be dealt with and its effects limited in many ways, even though a third party, as al-Mugheerah did when he asked 'Umar to be a mediator whilst at the same time explaining the situation and affirming how highly the leader thinks of the follower.

Conclusion

Following this exploration of the Sunnah and the methods which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used in dealing with people's mistakes, we should conclude by mentioning the following points:

1. Correcting mistakes is obligatory and very important. It is part of naseehah (giving sincere advice) and forbidding what is evil, but it should be remembered that Islam is not only about forbidding what is evil; we are also commanded to enjoin what is good.
2. Education and training are not merely the matter of correcting mistakes; they also involve teaching and showing the basic principles of religion and the rules of sharee'ah, and using various methods to establish these concepts firmly in people's minds and hearts, by example, by exhorting them, by telling stories, by discussing incidents, etc. From this it is clear that some parents and teachers are falling short by confining their efforts only to addressing mistakes without paying due attention to teaching the basics or dealing with mistakes before they happen by instilling that which will protect people from committing mistakes in the first place, or at least reduce their impact.
3. It is clear from the incidents and stories mentioned above that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used different approaches in dealing with different mistakes. This is because circumstances and personalities vary. Whoever understands this and wants to follow suit must compare the situation he is dealing with, with these examples to find the one that most closely resembles it, so that he can determine the most appropriate approach to use.

We ask Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, to guide us and protect us, to make us openers of good and closers of evil, and to guide others through us, for He is the All-Hearing, the Ever-Near, Who answers prayers. He is the Best of supporters and the Best

of helpers, and He is the Guide to the Straight Path. May Allah bless the Unlettered Prophet and all his family and companions.

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.