

Chapter 27: The Most Delicate Period of Life

The most delicate and crucial period of life is the childhood. The foundation for the future personality of the individual is established at this time. The slightest neglect might cause irreparable harm to the child's future personality and temperament. In fact, the first three years of the child's life play a very crucial role in the metamorphosis of its personality and character.

Perhaps all, and definitely most, people don't realize this very important aspect of upbringing of a child. They generally say,

"Small children, and babies in particular, have no capacity to comprehend anything. They cannot speak and therefore are incapable of expressing their thoughts and feelings. They are so helpless that they even have no control over their bowels and hence have no capability to learn anything on their own".

With such an attitude the parents squander the period of early childhood of the baby. This is the most impressionable and delicate period of the child's life. During this apparently uncomplicated period the moral, cultural and religious instincts of the child take shape.

In this early three years' period the child picks up several hundred words and gets acquainted with their meanings. It will start distinguishing between good and bad, friendship and enmity, pretty and ugly, small and big; it will also get the faculty of identifying different colors, the taste of foods.

It develops the faculty of observation and speech. It starts showing rudiments of the thought process. It learns to crawl and walk. It will learn to laugh and to cry. During this three years' period there will be thousands of events that might affect the psyche of the child and have a bearing on its future temperament.

Despite all this, there will hardly be any person who can recall events of the first three years of his life. All the events of the time will be under a cloud of oblivion and forgetfulness. But, all the same, those forgotten memories would already have had tremendous effects on the nature and personality of the individual. Several psychological ailments, fears, traumas, anger etc are the products of the events of the first few years of the person's life.

One psychologist writes:

“If the child doesn’t develop a strong personality in the early years of his life, then he will not have the capability to bear the onerous responsibilities which will confront him in the future. He will become the victim of several psychological defects. Therefore it is observed that the origin of nervous defects in a person can be traced to his childhood.

Whenever a psychiatrist investigates the causes of any mental illness he draws an inference that the person had such conditions in his early childhood that are affecting the chances of his escape from his existing psychological problems" 1

Dr Jalali writes:

“The foundation of the child’s social behaviour is laid in the first year of its life.Its bent of mind becomes evident during this period only.”2

Because of this, the responsible parents don’t neglect this delicate and impressionable period in the child’s life. They do not postpone the training of the child for the future. In fact the training and upbringing of the child commences with its birth.

Some intellectuals observe:

The child starts getting trained from its birth itself. The attention that the adults and other children around give him will be the first step of his training. Similarly the scenes and anecdotes that the child experiences and the sounds that he hears will have impact on its subconscious and have a bearing on his learning experience. Several habits and experiences that are the building blocks of the person’s character are connected with his childhood. Whatever attitude the parents adopt towards the child from its birth will have definite bearing on its upbringing and education.3

The time for commencement of moral training is the moment of the birth of the person. This is the time when the training commences without any possibility of failure. If the training is commenced later on, there will be likelihood of confronting negative attitudes in the child.4

‘Ali told to his son, Imam Hasan

“The child’s mind is like the virgin land. Whatever is put into it, will be accepted. Therefore, before your heart turned hard and engrossed otherwise, I took steps to make you polite.”5

1. Ruwan shinasī Khudak o baligh, p. 106

2. Ruwan shinasī Khudak o baligh, p. 302

3. Ilm al nafs al Tarbi, p. 19

4. Dar tarbiat, p. 79.

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