

Chapter 38: Fear

Fear is a universal phenomenon. Every living creature has the instinct of fear to a lesser or greater extent. In abstract terms fear is essential for the safety of human beings. A person who doesn't have the instinct of fear is not a psychologically normal person. This is the fear which makes man run away from dangerous calamities and save himself from death. Therefore, fear is a blessing that God has infused in the nature of human beings. But this blessing is useful only when man utilises it judiciously. Otherwise it will bring about harmful results. Fear manifests itself in two main forms:

First: Imaginary, misplaced and inane fears.

Second: Meaningful, reasonable and legitimate fears.

Inane Fears

The first category of inane fear can be the fear of devils, evil spirits; fear of the darkness, fear of harmless animals like cats, rats, frogs, camels, horses. Fear of thieves and burglars, fear of cadavers, the coffins; fear of the doctor and the shots he injects, fear of the lightning and fear of sleeping alone; fear of the examinations; fear of disease and death. There are a lot of such baseless fears that can become the bane of a person if he is not able to overcome them.

He is always obsessed with the fears and wakes up sometimes from sleep shouting and yelling as a result of seeing disturbing and horrendous dreams. Unnecessary fear and tension is a psychic illness that can have very harmful effects on the child's future life. A timid person will lack courage and while taking any major decisions he will be subject to great pressure. He will avoid meeting people and will always be worried and crestfallen. He will run away from congregations and will prefer a lonely existence. Several psychic illnesses spring from such inane fears in a person.

'Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

"Fear is calamitous."¹

Therefore a good mentor will makes efforts to see that the child remains free of unfounded fears. We

have some suggestions here for the consideration of the mentors:

1. Preventing fears is far better than curing them. Try to ensure that the child is not exposed to situations of unfounded fears that it turns timid. Psychologists observe that the sound of a running locomotive, lightning, thunders, sound of alarms and noises near the head of a baby can be the initial causes of fear in a child. As far as possible protect the child from such exposures.
2. Fear is infectious. The child by nature is not timid. But if the parents and others in his environment are timid, then the child gets into this habit. If you wish that your child had no fears, then seek a cure for your own fears. Don't express fear over unfounded causes of fear.
3. Watching films on the subject of crime and punishment, watching and listening to horror stories on the television and radio, reading and hearing mystery stories and even reading accounts of fearsome events in the papers and journals can be harmful for the children. As far as possible keep the impressionable children away from such things. Never talk about the Jinns and fairies to the children. If they have heard from some quarters about these, convince them that the existence of the Jinns is confirmed by the Qur'an but they also lead lives like the human beings and don't do us any harm.
4. Abstain from intimidating the child for his training. Don't frighten him with mention of the devil and evil spirits. These methods might be effective momentarily but they can render the child timid. As a punishment for misdemeanor the child should never be confined to a lonely dark corner. Some thoughtless mothers produce the sound of a cat or a dog from behind a wall to quieten their crying children. They don't know the harm such things might cause to the impressionable mind of the little child.

A person writes in his diary:

"Our grandma was in the habit of going to another room in the house and shouting in a changed tone, 'I am the devil have come to your house to eat you !'"We used to fall quiet with fear and in the belief that it was really the devil. Over a period of time such acts rendered me a timid person. This is the reason that I cannot stir alone out of my house. I am now a timid and nervous adult"

One woman writes:

"I was around five years then. I was playing one day in the courtyard with my cousin. Suddenly we noticed a horrible apparition. It had a big head, shining eyes, big long teeth, long and lose black dress and big black shoes in its feet. It was in the middle of the courtyard. Making weird sounds it wanted to gobble us. We yelled and ran into the dark attic. I clawed the wall with such intensity that my fingers were bruised. I fell unconscious with fear.

I had to be rushed to the doctor to revive me. For a long time I used to hide myself in corners with fear and the slightest commotion would upset my nerves. Even now I have shattered nerves and am unable to concentrate on any activity. Later on I learnt that the apparition was a practical joke of another of my

cousins. She put a painted earthen pot over her head to frighten us out of our wits. She has become the cause of my nervous condition."

5. If your child is timid because of your carelessness or other causes, then don't neglect his condition any further. Try to rectify the situation as soon as possible. If the child realizes that his fears are unfounded, he will become normal by himself. But shouting at the child and ridiculing him and putting him to shame in front of others is no solution for the problem.

Such acts on the one hand do not remove the child's fears and on the other hand make him morose and despondent. He doesn't want to remain timid. Your carelessness and other causes have made him timid. Try to find the causes of his fears with patience and thoughtfulness. Then search for remedies.

If the child is afraid of imaginary devils and evil spirits, convince him that there are no such things. Tell him that the Jinns have nothing to do with the humans. If the child fears the harmless animals, demonstrate to him practically that the animals are harmless. If the child is scared of darkness, acquaint him with places with reduced lighting. When you are yourself with the child, momentarily put off the light. Then progressively increase the period of darkness. When you are in the same room with the child at some distance, repeat the experiment of putting off and switching on the lights. Repeat these trials with patience till the fear of darkness is removed from the mind of the child.

Remember No harsh methods should be employed to correct the fear complex of the child. Forcing a child to face the things he fears will have negative results. If the child is afraid of going to the doctor and taking vaccinations then convince him with love and affection about the need for the treatment.

Sometimes the situation demands that the child has to be admitted to a pediatric hospital. It will be a difficult time that the child does not like to be away from the parents. If the child is forced to admit in the hospital against his wish, it can be very difficult on him. Sometimes it is useful to acquaint the child with the environment of a hospital.

When the parents go visiting a patient in a hospital, they should take the child there for a short visit that he gets acquainted with the environment. Meeting the kind doctors and nurses in the hospital will remove the fear from the child's mind and in the event of his needing hospitalization he would agree to comply without much fuss.

Before taking the child to the hospital the parents should convince him that his health needs the attention of the kind doctors and nurses and he must go to the hospital to get well soon and return. Tell him that they would visit him at the hospital along with other members of the family. Never tell a falsehood to the child. When you have to leave him in the hospital bed, don't tell him that he should sleep and you will remain seated there. Don't give him a false hope that he would not be given the medicines. Convince him that he is ill and the treatment at the hospital is necessary for his quick recovery.

Legitimate Fears

As far as the legitimate fears of a child are concerned, the mentor should adopt a clever, thoughtful attitude towards them. Mention about dangerous situations to the child and discuss their remedies. Inform him about the bad consequences of negligence. Demonstrate to him the correct use of matches, gas and electrical gadgets and the dangers associated with these things.

Teach him the right way of crossing a busy road and acquaint him with the traffic rules for the pedestrians. Frankly mention to the child the dangers which might confront him in his daily life. Acquaint him with the safety measures and create in him the faith on himself and trust in Allah. He should be prepared to meet the challenges in his daily life, rather than getting scared of the dangers around him.

Another legitimate fear is the fear of death. But excessive fear of death turns into a psychic ailment. This fear takes away the spiritual calm and composure from a person. And blunts his physical capabilities. It is therefore necessary to take preventive measures against this type of fear. For sometime the child does not understand the meaning of death. It is better the mentor don't talk about this phenomenon at this stage. But sometimes the child learns about this at the death of someone close to him. It is quite possible the child might ask questions about death in such a situation.

If the child has reached the stage of understanding at that time, then the parents must reveal to him the truth. They must tell him that death is not anything special but it is a transition from the present world to another. In that world he will get reward for his good deeds and retribution for his evil deeds committed in this world. Everyone has to die one day. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, '**All people will die**'. Death is not important but the actions in this life are important that the Judgment in the other world is made according to the actions of the person in this life.

Excessive thought of death is not good. It should not enter the realm of a lurking fear . This will be harmful.

Another positive aspect of fear is the fear of God and the fear of the Day of Judgment. These fears should not be so intense that they result in nervous tensions for the person. These fears encourage a person to do good deeds and stop him from evil acts. Therefore Allah says in the Holy Book:

"If you are among the faithful, fear not others and fear Me alone." (Qur'an, 3: 175)

Also the Qur'an describes the hardships and retributions of the Day of Judgment. Therefore a thoughtful and faithful mentor puts the idea of the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter in the impressionable minds of his charges.

It will be in place to remind that a good mentor should not all the time talk of the Heaven and the Hell and give an impression to the child that God is severe on His creations. But the mentor should acquaint the child more with the benevolence of Almighty Allah.

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