

Chapter 41: Taqlid or Emulation

The instinct to emulate is the strongest characteristic of human nature. This too is a very useful and valuable trait. This helps the child to progress with its learning process like eating, dressing, speaking and other societal happenings in the environment.

The human being is a natural mimic and keeps doing it throughout his life but children till the age of around five years do this more. For a long time the faculties of the child are not so developed that it is not able to decide the course of action by itself. In this period it emulates what the parents and others do in front of him.

The child hears the word "water" from its parents and tries to repeat it himself. Then it gives attention to the meaning of the word and uses the word at appropriate time. A girl observes her mother cleaning the room and washing the clothes. She too tries to do the same chores. She sees that the mother exercises care while handling fire, she sees that the mother washes the fruits prior to peeling and eating them.

The child too emulates these habits. She observes that the parents and her elder siblings are arranging things properly in the house. She too tries to copy them in these activities. She notices that her parents are polite in their talk with others, she too cultivates good manners. She finds that the parents and her siblings are aiding each other in doing household work. She too tries to give a helping hand.

When she sees that the parents cross the roads carefully at pedestrian-zebra-crossing, she too learns to do this. When the son sees his father gardening in the backyard or does some repair work at the house, he too tries to learn the tasks. In the beginning he tries to do these things in play but with the passage of time he becomes proficient. Some of them become so adept that they take the activity as a profession.

The upbringing and training of the child is better achieved by setting an example for him rather than through precept. Emulation of the actions of the elders is an automatic phenomenon in the children and they needn't necessarily be told to perform these actions. If a parent is boorish, impolite and impertinent the child will follow in his footsteps. When a mother is nagging, shrewish and insensible then there is every likelihood of the child going after her.

A mentor who is a liar, cowardly and dishonest person cannot expect to make his subject a truthful, bold and honest individual. The children don't pay much heed to the lecturing of the elders. They rather prefer to emulate their actions. It is therefore imperative to promote the habit of emulation in the children. Care has to be exercised to see that the elders perform such actions in the company of children that they grow into ideal individuals. For the love of their children the parents must reform their own habits to provide an ideal image for them. The parents should always bear in their mind that it is very difficult to stop the children from emulating their own habits, good or bad.

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, says:

"If you wish to reform others then reform yourself first. It is a major failing that you stand up to correct others while you yourselves are having aberrations which need reform."¹

The Holy Prophet told to Abu Dharr:

"Allah will give noble and virtuous children and grand children to pious parents."²

A responsible mentor will not remain indifferent to the type of friends the child has. The children have very impressionable minds and they tend to readily emulate the habits of their friends. It is therefore very important to take care of the type of company the children keep.

Sometimes when the children witness acts of violence on the cinema or television screen they may develop a tendency for perpetrating such acts. You must be reading about such acts of delinquency by children in the newspapers and the motivation for these acts mostly is the scenes of murder and mayhem presented on cinema and television. In such circumstances is it proper to expose the children to these media without any control?

1. Ghara al-hukm, p. 278

2. Makarim al akhlaq, p. 546

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