

Chapter 58: Respect

It is always the wish of the parents that their children are well behaved. Good and polite children are a source of pride for every parent. The well behaved children politely greet the person they visit, shake hands with him, enquire about his health, converse softly, limit the conversation to what is asked of them and say proper adieus when departing from the hosts place. Such children give due respect to the elders, when elders arrive they politely stand up, show deference to the scholars, religious figures and generally respect pious and good persons.

In a gathering they remain cool and collected, don't talk loudly, thank the person who gives them something, don't interrupt others, particularly the elders during conversations. They say Bismillah (In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful), the Islamic Grace, before starting to eat, they take small morsels of food, don't eat excessively, don't throw food on the table or the floor and follow all the required table manners.

They take care of their dresses that they don't get stained and try to remain clean and tidy. They will be considerate to the others and never hurt others feelings. They walk with a decent gait and give the impression of being obedient and decent children. They don't ridicule others with practical jokes and when someone speaks to them, they listen with rapt attention.

It is not only the parents who like polite children, but they are popular with all who happen to interact with them. Impertinent and impolite children are abhorred by all.

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, says:

"Respectability is the zenith of humanity."¹

"Respect (politeness) in a man is like pretty raiment."²

"Good behavior (politeness) is required by people more than silver or gold."³

"There is no better embellishment than politeness in a man."⁴

"The best inheritance a father can give to his son is to train him to be of polite."⁵

"An impolite person will have more failings" ⁶

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq says:

"Allow your child to play till the seven years of age, then teach him good manners and politeness."⁷

The Holy Prophet of Islam said:

"The child has three rights over its parents: 1. They select a good name for him/her. 2. Make him/her respectful (polite).3. Arrange a good spouse for him/her .⁸

The fondest hope of every parent will be that their children grow into polite and respectable persons. But this hope cannot be fulfilled without sincere and continued efforts. It will not be possible to infuse this trait in the children with sermonizing. The best route to this end is setting ideal example before the children by the parents with their exemplary behavior in their daily lives.

'Ali has said:

"Best behavior is that which you yourself start to practice."⁹

"Start instruction with oneself and then teach others. First make your character perfect and then sermon and advise others."¹⁰

Children are natural mimics. The capability to copy is very strong in their nature. The children imitate the ways of their parents and others around them. He will talk like them and he would try to walk like them. Instruction, off course, is a very important aspect of training, but it is not as strong as the capacity to mimic and learn, particularly in the early stages of childhood.

The parents, who are particular that their children should be polite and well behaved, must take special care to see that they are training them by personal examples. If the parents are polite to one another, naturally the children will follow suit.

The parents who themselves are devoid of politeness and good manners, should not expect good manners from their children. They might lecture the children hundreds of times on the norms of good behavior and politeness, but the children would be behaving under the experience of the attitude of the parents and others in the household. If the parents are impolite and abusive to each other, they will be setting a negative example to their growing children.

Children from such homes will be as bad mannered as the parents or, perhaps, more so. Any attempt at correcting them will fall on deaf ears. They will naturally think that the parents are asking them to do what they themselves don't practice.

Example is always better than precept. But it is not right to think that lecturing will be totally ineffective. Good parents, who also set good example for their children, can always talk to them about the norms of good conduct and they will definitely accept their advice. This advice too has to be given with politeness.

There are parents who express their anger rather harshly when they notice the children doing something wrong. Sometimes they might say, "You naughty fellow Why didn't you wish the visitor? Why didn't you say 'Bi' to him? Are you dumb? Stupid and manner less child, why did you spread your legs impolitely in front of elderly visitors? Why were you noisy while visiting our friend's home You beast Why do you impolitely interrupt the conversation!"

These ignorant parents think that they are correcting their children with such talk. They don't know that good manners are not taught with bad manners. If the child is guilty of any indiscretion, he must be politely cautioned. There should not be others present at such sessions that should be conducted in a cool and friendly manner.

The Prophet of Islam used to greet the children and say, "I greet the children so that greeting becomes their habit."

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1. Gharar al hukm, p. 34
 2. Gharar al hukm, p. 21
 3. Gharar al hukm, p. 242
 4. Gharar al hukm, p. 830
 5. Gharar al hukm, p. 293
 6. Gharar al hukm, p. 634
 7. Bihar al-anwar, v104, p. 95
 8. Wasail al-shiah, v 15, p. 123
 9. Gharar al hukm, p. 191
 10. Nahj ul balagha, v3, p. 166

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