

Chapter 60: Jealousy

Jealousy or envy is a negative trait in human beings. A jealous person always envies others who are happy and comfortable. When he finds something good and attractive with others, he wishes that they lost the thing. Generally such a jealous person is neither capable of snatching away the good thing from the other person nor harm him in any way.

He continues to sulk and brood. He will be burning in the flames of jealousy day and night. An envious person is devoid of the pleasures and comforts of the world and the feelings of deprivation and the thought of the amenities enjoyed by others makes his own life miserable.

The Prophet of Islam has said:

“A jealous person is the unhappiest of his compatriots.”¹

‘Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

"Envy makes the life of a jealous person bleak." ²

“An envious person never gets contentment and happiness.”³

Jealousy has deleterious effects on the nerves and heart of a person and makes him sick and weak.

‘Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

“An envious person is always feeble and debilitated.”⁴

Jealousy weakens the roots of the person’s faith and turns him towards sin and disbelief. Lots of murders, fights and other crimes are the result of envy and jealousy. Sometimes the envious person does backbiting of the person he is jealous of and spreads rumors and inappropriate designations about him. He sometimes causes damage to the properties of the other person.

Imam Muhammad al Baqir said:

“Envy destroys faith in the way fire destroys the fuel.” 5

Jealousy is a part of the human nature. There will hardly be any persons who don't have this instinct.

The Prophet of Islam says:

“There are three things no person is devoid of: base thoughts, bad actions, and jealousy”6

Therefore, this undesirable instinct must be curbed with all the force at the disposal of a person. It should not be allowed to flourish and grow. If the instinct of envy is allowed to persist, since it is a part of the person's nature, it would grow at leaps and bounds. It will reach such proportions that fighting it out will not be possible.

The best time when good manners are cultivated and the bad ones are eliminated is the childhood of a person. The element of jealousy too will be present in a child. The parents, with their own behavior, and proper attention to the child, can definitely cure the child of the rudiments of the malady of jealousy that manifest in his behavior now and then.

If the parents treat all their children equitably, without any favoritism, the problem of one envying the other doesn't arise. The raiment, the food and other things in the use of the children should be of the same quality and standard. They should keep in mind equity in the matter of pocket money and general treatment of the children. They should not overtly compare the capabilities of the children in their presence, and even with others, if there is likelihood of the children learning about the comparison being made.

Such attitude can curb whatever degree of capability the weaker child has and might render him totally incompetent. These well-meaning but ignorant parents think that they are training the child. To the contrary they aren't able to fulfill their purpose and are adding fuel to the fire. The innocent child's heart gets the ideas of jealousy and hate. He may get motivated to commit acts of enmity. There can always be the risk of his taking out spleen on his own siblings.

The parents should never compare their children with others'. They should never praise other children very much particularly in comparison with their own. It is not proper if the parents tell to their children, “How well behaved, polite and studious is our neighbor's son. How obedient he is and also he helps his mother with her work. His parents are really lucky to have a son like him.” Such parents must understand that this type of comparison might hurt the ego of the child and have harmful implications. The child, instead of mending his ways, may become adamant and revengeful.

The parents must strictly avoid comparing children. Some children are always more proficient, better looking or smarter than others. It is possible that the parents may be more attached to one child than the others. There is no harm in this attitude. This is a normal human instinct. But in talk and actions they should not show any discrimination between the children.

They must ensure equitable treatment for all the children. If they desire to give any special treatment to a particular child, they should do it while other children are not around. Even if the parents are taking full care to give equitable treatment to all the children, the element of jealousy, which is instinctive in human nature, will still be present in the children to some extent. Every child wishes to be the darling of the parents and none other should have this privilege.

When he notices the parents expressing affection to the other siblings, he will feel momentary pang of jealousy. The child will slowly understand that he has to share the affection of the parents with the other brothers and sisters. The others too have a right over the parents. The parents, with discreet handling of the situation, can make the child accept the other brothers and sisters and thus prevent him from continuing with his feeling of envy.

If you find that your son is envious of his brother or sister for some reason: he bullies them, pinches them, and uses harsh words with them, tries to deprive them of their shares of fruits and sweets, then he needs more of your attention. You should not close your eyes to these activities of the child.

You must impress on him that he is growing big and his little brother needs more attention than him. You must tell him that when he was a small kid like his little brother now, he too required and received more attention. Instead of trying to mend his ways strictly, impress on him that the little children are his own brothers and sisters. They too love him. If he didn't love them, who would? He must protect them if someone else tries to hurt them. Allah has given to him such lovely brothers and sisters, for which he must be thankful.

In conclusion it is necessary to mention that maintaining totally equitable treatment to all the children might be Utopian. How can the parents treat the son, the daughter, the elder and the younger the same way? The elder children can generally be given more freedom. But the younger ones have to be given more care. The elder ones will get more pocket money. The younger ones require more protection.

The sons are generally given more freedom of movement than the daughters. Therefore, keeping in mind the need for equity and freedom, the parents have to adopt different approach for the sons and the daughters. This treatment might give to the children some hard feelings. But if the parents properly explain to them that they have the same affection for all the children, but the norms of behavior for people differ according to the gender and age.

Although envy and jealousy are very undesirable traits in the eyes of Islam, and are in fact considered sins, the spirit of competition and rivalry are the components of efforts and struggle for human advancement. The difference between envy and rivalry is that a person becomes a rival of another person to match his achievements and to go ahead of him; but an envious person only feels jealous and is unable to compete and come forward. Rivalry in every field of activity is a healthy phenomenon. The human civilization could have become stagnant without rivalry and competition.

One person writes:

"I had a sister two years elder to me. My parents used to love me more than her. Whatever I desired for, they used to give me. At every opportunity they used to praise me and totally neglected mention of my sister. My sister always used to nag me. Whenever she had a chance, she would beat and pinch me, call me names and break my favorite toys. She never wanted me to be happy for a moment. I used to think why my sister is troubling me so much? What wrong I have done to her?"

She was very jealous of me and perhaps the partial behavior of the parents was reason for this rancor in her mind. The parents never realized that because of their partiality. My sister would try to take revenge on me. Now that my parents are no more, my sister is very kind with me. She feels very much if I have the slightest discomfort"

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1. Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 327
 2. Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 328
 3. Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 327
 4. Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 328
 5. Shafi, v 1, p. 173
 6. al-mahajjatul bayda, v 3, p. 189

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