

Chapter 74: Physical Punishment

Lots of parents give physical punishment to their children in the interest of proper upbringing. Even some teachers too contribute to this attitude. They believe that the devils cannot be tamed with mere words. In the past a majority of people believed in this dictum. Those days the canes, chains and whips were considered important tools to be handy with a school.

The parents desirous of good upbringing of their children never abstained from beating them when required. But most intellectuals consider this tyrannical method of upbringing as barbaric and harmful for the children. In most developed countries of the world there is almost a total ban on the physical punishment for correction of children.

A child cannot be reformed through physical punishments. Perhaps, it might have a temporary effect on the child, but will be very harmful in a longer run. For example:

1. When a child is beaten, he gets habituated of bowing down his head to torture and force. He may perhaps start thinking that force is the only key to success. He starts thinking that when one is angry, he should beat. By giving physical punishment to the children, the parents set an example for them to adopt the tyrannical laws of the jungle in their future lives.
2. The children who get beatings, develop hate and antagonism against their parents. The children never forget the harsh treatment they received at the hands of the parents. Such children might even become rebellious.
3. Repeated beatings can make a child timid and cowardly. The personality of the child can also be suppressed with physical punishment. He might later on become a victim of psychological ailments.
4. In most cases physical punishment seldom improves the child. It doesn't create a wish in the child to correct his behavior. He might perhaps show some momentary signs of change out of fear of the rod and the beatings, but is no guarantee that he will not repeat the same act again. His basic failing will persist in his subconscious mind. It will manifest itself later on in some other form.

One person says:

“My twelve year old son picked up some money from my wife’s wardrobe. When I came to know about this, I punished him with a stick. From that time, he never went near his mother’s wardrobe.

It is true that the boy did not pick anything else from his mother’s wardrobe. The father appears to have succeeded by meting out physical punishment to the child. But the matter was not so simple.

The story proceeded further. The boy found other subterfuges to continue his bad activities. He started boarding the omnibus and avoiding to pay the fare to the conductor. When his mother asked him to shop at the grocers, he would pinch the change. Later on it was learned that he has stolen money from his friends too. The conclusion of the story is that, when the child was beaten for one fault, he cleverly didn’t repeat that act. But his mind worked overtime, and he invented other methods of committing thefts.¹

One intellectual writes:

“The children who receive corrective beatings, become weak and useless persons. Or, otherwise they turn into stubborn and deceitful persons. They seem to be taking revenge of the ill treatment received in their childhood.²

Mr Russel writes:

"In my opinion, physical punishment of children is not right in any way."³

Islam too has termed physical punishment harmful and has prohibited it.

‘Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

“The intelligent person gets guidance through politeness, it is only the animals that cannot be corrected without beatings."⁴

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq says:

“Whoever whips another person once, Allah will shower the fiery whip against him."⁵

The Prophet of Islam said:

“Use love and affection in education and upbringing and don’t have access to cruelty because a wise mentor is better than a cruel one."⁶

One person said that he complained about his son to Imam Moosa bin Ja’far. The Imam replied, “Don’t ever beat him But maintain a distance from him, and this distance too should not be kept for too long!⁷

Physical punishments are very harmful for the upbringing of the children and they must be avoided. But if there is no other way of correcting the child, adopt it as a last resort. Islam too permits this in certain conditions.

The Prophet of Islam has said:

“Ask your children to start offering prayers at the age of six years. If they don’t listen to your repeated warnings, you may beat them to become regular at offering prayers when they are seven years old.”⁸

In another tradition Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq says:

“When the child is nine years old, teach him to do the Wudhu’ (the ablution prior to offering prayers); order him to do the Wudhu’ and pray. If the child doesn’t obey, beat him and make him offer prayers.”⁹

Imam ‘Ali has said:

“As you reprimand your own son, so can you reprimand an orphan. And the occasion on which you might beat your son, you can beat the orphan on a similar occasion.”¹⁰

“If your slave disobeys Allah, beat him. If he disobeys you, forgive him.”¹¹

One person came to the presence of the Prophet of Islam and said that an orphaned child was in his care. He wanted to know if he can beat the child to correct him. The Prophet replied:

“In a situation where you can beat your son, you may beat the orphan on a similar situation in his best interests.”¹²

It is always better not to make access to the physical punishment of children as far as possible. And when it becomes necessary, make use of maximum restraint in the matter. The punishment must be well thought out and appropriate to the occasion.

One person asked the Prophet of Islam:

“The members of my family don’t obey me. How should I reform them ?” The Prophet replied: “Forgive them!” The man repeated the question a second, and a third time. The Holy Prophet gave the same reply; but then he said: “If you wish to reprimand your people, then you must keep in mind that the punishment should not be more than their misdemeanor. You should also abstain from beating them on their faces.”¹³

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq has said:

“If needed, don’t inflict more than five or six blows to your child or the servant and these blows should not be too severe.”¹⁴

While reprimanding children, better don’t do it in the presence of others. Others’ presence might cause mental torture to the children and might harm them. If the beating is excessive, there is a Deet or fine prescribed in Islam for one who inflicts the punishment. Therefore, care must be exercised while beating the children to correct them. According to the Islamic Laws, if a person’s face turns black on account of

the beating, the fine is six Gold Dinars (coins). If the face turns blue, three dinars and for a red face, a Dinar and Half. 15

The parents have no right to behave like tyrants with their children. They must not kick them, box them and beat them with chains and rods.

Islam does permit reprimanding and beating the child for purposes of correction and, in fact, orders such action. We find that the youth in the Western countries go astray because of excess of freedom given to them.

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1. Ruwan Shinasi Tajrubi Kudak, p. 263
 2. Ruwan Shinashi Tajrubi Kudak, p. 266
 3. Dar Tarbiat, p. 169
 4. Gharar al hukm, p. 236
 5. Wasail al shiah, v 19, p. 14
 6. Bihar al-anwar, v 77, p. 175
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 8. Mustadrak al-wasail, v 1, p. 171
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 12. Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 625
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 14. Wasail al shiah, v 18, p. 581
 15. Wasail al shiah, v 19, p. 295

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