

Chapter 76: Encouragement and Reward

One very good method of good upbringing is the appreciation and encouragement when a child performs well. This will have a salutary effect on the mind of the child. It will provide him the reason to do still better in the future. Every human being loves himself. In his own way he thinks of developing and advancing his personality. He wants that others recognize and appreciate his personality. If he receives the appreciation of others, he will strive for further improvement. But if he is discouraged, his enthusiasm will be dampened. A few suggestions for obtaining good results are given here:

1. The actions of the child can be appreciated, but not too often. Because , if the appreciation is too much, it might lose its importance in the eyes of the child. He may then take your appreciation as a matter of routine.
2. The appreciation of the child should be at a specific place and time so that he realizes why and for what he is being commended. Then he will try to perform better and earn appreciation on other occasions too. This is the reason that repeated and unnecessary appreciation is not advisable. For example, if a child is repeatedly given a pat on his back that he is a good and polite individual, it might lose its significance for him. The child will not be able to comprehend the reason for the appreciation.
3. It is also necessary that good acts and works of the child are appreciated and not his person. This way he will understand that he is praised for what he does, and not for what he is the importance of every person is because of his achievements.
4. While praising a child, never compare him with other children. For example the father should not tell to his son, “You are a good and truthful boy, unlike Hasan who is a liar. “This attitude might make the child form a poor opinion about the other boy. While comparing the children, the parent is doing faulty upbringing of the good child.
5. The praises and commendations of the child must be within certain limits. Excess of these might make the child proud and conceited.

Imam ‘Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

“Lots of people develop conceit for the reason of praises heaped on them.”¹

“Don’t exaggerate in praising others.”²

One very good tool for effective upbringing and training is giving of rewards. Rewards are not a bad method of encouragement if they are spontaneous and not in fulfillment of an earlier promise that if the child achieved a certain thing, he would be given a particular gift. If promises are made to the child beforehand, it might have negative impact on him. The child starts expecting a gift for every good thing he does. This will become a sort of gratification and the child would not strive to do better if these gifts stop forthcoming.

A person should have the habit of doing good deeds. He should do them to please Allah and serve mankind and not with an eye on the probable material rewards. If the child gets used to receiving gifts for every small reason, he might become narrow minded and selfish. He may not think it his duty to do anything for others, unless he gets something in return for his efforts.

He will try to escape from doing anything for others, as far as possible. This attitude is a very big fault in a person and the society. The rewards for any good work to the children, therefore, should be few and selective that receiving such gifts don’t become a second nature for them.

When a child gets into the habit of doing tasks with his own initiative, reduce the frequency of gifts and rewards. Encourage him to do the work. Many parents give gifts to their children getting higher grades at their examinations. This way they encourage them to work harder at their studies. Perhaps this method is effective to some extent.

But there is a big defect in this. That it affects the child’s sense of responsibility. The child works hard at his studies only because he wants to get the gift by obtaining higher grades. Otherwise, he would not bother to work hard. For everything he does, he expects a gift in reward for that.

One person writes:

"I was admitted to the fourth standard of a Religious School. I was very poor at the recitation of the Holy Qur’an. But my other class-mates were very good at their recitation. In the very first class I attended, the teacher asked me kindly, “Can you recite the Holy Qur’an?” I replied nervously, “No, Sir. “He rejoined, “Don’t worry, I shall give you the lessons. I know you can become one of the good students in the class.

Whatever doubts you may have, don’t hesitate to ask me. These kind words of the teacher encouraged me and I started working with determination on my studies. By the end of the year I excelled at recitation of the Qur’an. I reached such a degree of proficiency that in the absence of the teacher I was asked to conduct the class. I was also made responsible for reciting verses from the Qur’an at the morning assembly before commencement of the classes"

One girl writes in her memoirs:

“My father was a progressive person. One day, when my mother was away, he invited some of my teachers for the meal. He brought the ingredients for cooking and gave to me. I started to work in the kitchen with enthusiasm. In the noon Dad arrived with his friends. When I poured the victuals in the dishes, I noticed that they were not cooked properly.

The chicken was half done and the rice has become slushy with excessive water added while cooking it. All this was because, I had not properly learned the art of cooking. I was very worried. I was expecting a reprimand from my Dad at any moment. But contrary to all my expectations, Dad praised me in front of his friends. He said, “This food has been cooked by my darling daughter. It is so tasty!”

The guests too assented in agreement and praised me for my effort. Later on my Dad gave me a pat on my back. This word of encouragement enthused me to start earnestly at learning the culinary art. Today I am an expert at preparing lots of very good dishes.”

Gharar al hukm, p. 209

1. Bihar al-anwar, v 72, p. 295

2. Gharar al hukm, p. 209

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