

Section 4: Raising Children In Islam

The Necessity of a Role Model, Parents

We are all aware of the notion that an appropriate “role model” is a central character in our children’s upbringing but whom they trust and accept enough to idolize is another factor. One of the dilemmas we are facing today arises from a clash of values between modern and classical ways of living. If we ever want to be able to influence our children’s behavior in a positive way there should exist a mutual understanding and a common bond between the present and the previous generations.

With such a relation, no elderly person would ever feel lonely or deserted. The youth on the other hand will find an opportunity to enjoy a taste of experiences and memories lavished upon them by their elderly. But who is brave enough to take the first valuable step and bring the two generations closer to one another?

Parents for one thing, can play an important role as mediators. Children, whose parents respect the elders, have a natural tendency to follow the example of their parents and respect their elders in every way. It is said that children are not always attracted by the conduct of their elders. What is left out of this saying is that we have the power to teach our children through our own behavior and manner.

The Role Of The Parents

A good way of approaching this matter is giving the youth some air. They must be free to speak-up, express their opinions, vote and decide for themselves. This would certainly open their minds and build up their characters while supplying them with ample self-esteem. Then the boundaries must be respected. They should be reminded to display self-control whenever it is considered necessary; for example in the presence of elders.

Reverence rendered by the youth in this way, will elevate the relation to a higher, more intimate level. Continual “do’s–and–don’ts” are poisonous, and would most certainly outrage our youngsters. This does not imply bringing up uncontrollable and disobedient kids who would not pay attention to what others have to say. Modesty is the only true path to choose. And the task of teaching this to the youngsters is thrust upon the parents. Good manners and reverence toward elders are considered as great treasures we can leave behind for the next generation.

So let’s leave them a valuable inheritance they would thank us for.

Variability

Bringing up children according to the standards of the changing world of today seems indispensable. It is wonderful to keep up with the excelling society, but not at the price of dismissing our national ethnicity or religious background while yielding to foreign cultures without a second thought.

Imam Ali (AS) counsels:

“Do not force your own customs upon your children for they are in other times than yours.”

This is not to be confused with the notion of falling away from your own culture. Living up to the standards of the modern society differs from following the example of the western way of life, and importing their customs and styles blindfolded.

We have already talked about the bond that should exist between previous and present generations. Once the elders have taken in the fact that youngsters are living in different times than their own, they will come to a more realistic view and understanding of them.

Correspondingly, once the youngsters recognize the fact that their parents and grandparents come from a different society, they will confront them with a rational, more understanding approach. What you have to keep in mind is sustaining our fundamental principles of belief, which is obtained through mutual understanding and respect between the two generations.

The Youth

Contrary to elders, youth are known to be rather tender, and more easily hurt. That is why we must master the art of approaching them correctly. To flourish their talents they need to be recognized and praised at home and in public. The Prophet (SAW) attracted the attention of the youth by treating them

with nothing but respect.

“Never mistreat your youngsters, for they are particularly sensitive. It was them who backed me up and formed an alliance with me at the time when the elderly were waging a war against me.”

Their clear conscience allows them to accept the truth more readily than most elders. The Prophet (SAW) teaches us that by supporting the youth, you will lead them toward the path of prosperity. So let's take the first step towards developing an understanding between the two generations, and making way to a peaceful and more intimate relationship that will benefit both the elderly and the youth.

Religious Training Of Children

Parents have been given the noble duty of guiding the future generation. It is their task to ensure that their children get a sound religious education. In this way they are carrying on the work of the Prophets, who guided the people. The Holy Qur'an says:

“O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is man and stones.”(Holy Qur'an 66:6).

In today's society, a lot of emphasis is placed on secular education. A child is pushed to strive for excellence in academics. A college or university education is a necessity, both for boys and girls. Education is indeed very important, but the significance of religious education for a balanced personality must not be over-looked. The world is producing a generation that knows a lot, but is greatly deficient in moral and spiritual values.

The Prophet (SAW) was once talking to his companions about the importance of religious education. He told them he was “baree” (far) from the parents of the last times. They asked him the reason and he explained those parents would give a lot of importance to secular education, but neglect the religious education. May the Almighty protect us from being amongst them.

What exactly is meant by religious education? The following are some necessary parts of a religious training:

Beliefs

In God

A firm belief in the Creator is the source of all good. If a child grows up by believing in God, he will learn to be conscientious. Life will hold meaningful and responsible. Children must be taught about the existence of God, and the abundance of blessings he has bestowed upon us. Nature, Science etc. should all be used to point out the greatness of the Creator. Expose the child to books and films that

show people with firm faith in God, and illustrate how the faith helps those overcome obstacles and problems.

Children should not be given the impression that Allah would like to punish humans for every wrong they do. Some parents and educators warn children about the punishment of Allah in order to scare them into being good. Although it is necessary to talk about punishment at times, it is of greater advantage to focus on the positive side. Allah is greatly merciful, loves us and is willing to help and guide us. Teach children to love Allah, trust in Him, and to ask from Him all their needs. This positive attitude will help the child build a lasting relationship with Allah.

In the Hereafter

Children should be gradually introduced to the idea of death and the life hereafter. Although it may be confusing to younger children, it is advisable that parents should talk about it from time to time, especially as the children grow older. A death in the family or community could be used as an example that all humans are mortal, and each one of us will go the same way. It is best to be honest with the child.

In the Prophets and Imams

It is necessary for children to understand the role of the prophets, and have love for the holy Prophet (S) and the Imam (A). This can be taught by reading stories of their lives to them. It is also important to attach significance to the occasions when we commemorate their births and deaths.

Going to Masjid or religious centers on these occasions helps to a great deal. They remember the said personality and also learn something about him or her. It is a great way of keeping their faith alive.

Rituals

Although beliefs are most important, parents also have to teach practical part of following religion. Faith and action do go together. From a young age, a child should be encouraged to pray, recite the Qur'an, perform wudhu etc. Some parents think it is a bother to have young children do these things and wait until they are almost baligh. The love for such actions does not develop, and may then have to be forced to carry them out. It is much better to start at an early age when the children are willing to imitate the parents and have an interest in praying and doing wudhu.

The daily prayers are the most important action in Islam, and it is the duty of all parents to ensure that the children pray properly and regularly. The Prophet (S) said:

“Teach your children the prayer when they are seven, and beat them if they do not recite it when they are ten.”

Thus when the child becomes baligh and does not wish to pray it is necessary to force him to do so. It should be mentioned that children need to be observed when they first begin to pray by themselves. Many children pray very quickly, and the actions resemble a quick exercise rather than a prayer. If possible, parents should try and pray with their children, at least sometimes. It is not a good idea to tell children to pray by themselves in their rooms. Out of the view of the parents. This could encourage them to skip some prayers altogether, and then lie about it. Shaytan is very strong, and the child is easily too preyed.

Another important part of religious training is to teach the child to recite the Qur’an. It is a right of the child. Many parents are already aware of this responsibility and strive to make their children good reciters of the Qur’an. But one must be wary not to do it compete with others, or to show off to the community. Some children become fluent reciters of the Qur’an but are not regular in their prayers and are generally lax in their obedience to Allah. The child should also be encouraged to understand the Qur’an. This could be done by reading the translation occasionally, or even learning the Arabic language.

Morals

This is an extremely important aspect of Islam and should not be ignored. Good morals are the key to virtuous life. The child should be taught about noble characteristics such as honesty, kindness, justice, contentment etc. He should be taught to avoid jealousy, backbiting, greed, extravagance etc. a small reminder, or a simple discussion often makes a lasting impression. Many children remember the advice given to them by their parents and grandparents long into adulthood. Parents should never underestimate the effect of their words and deeds on the hearts of their children.

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