

The Islamic Approach to Pious Parenting



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The Islamic Approach to Pious Parenting

By Shaykh Saleem Bhimji

This article has been developed through the contents of a lecture delivered by Shaykh Saleem in Edmonton, Alberta in 2011 to mark the martyrdom of the sons of Muslim Ibne Aqeel – Muhammad and Ibrahim.

What is Parenting?

In a nutshell, parenting is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood.

As followers of a Divinely revealed religious tradition, Islam, we appreciate the fact that all of these areas of promotion and support must take place within the legal framework of the teachings of the Qur'an and the guidance of Prophet Muhammad and his immaculate successors – the Ahlul Bayt, and other worthy individuals who followed them.

It is not simply enough to “make children” – rather to be considered as a parent – be it a mother or father – one must rise to the occasions and ensure that their children have had all aspects of their lives taken care of – both the temporal aspects and also the spiritual arena nurtured and maintained – to the best of the parents' abilities.

“Requirements” of Parenting

There are three prime areas which parents/guardians need to ensure that they look after when they take on this great responsibility of working with their children to make them the best human beings possible. These are actually basic life requirements and are a necessity for all people to have and enjoy without which life has the potential to be thrown into turmoil.

1. Physical Security & Development

1. Physical Security & Development: The safety of a child's body and life

It goes without saying that all people need to have safety and security, and for this, we see that nations spend millions of dollars to ensure that the safety and well-being of its citizens is maintained.

2. Intellectual Security & Development

2. Intellectual Security & Development: The conditions in which a child's mind can develop

It is not enough to be 'physically safe' but one must also have intellectual security – they must live with the knowledge that they are given the tools to grow and mature mentally and that they will be protected from intellectual harms and evils.

3. Emotional Security & Development

3. Emotional Security & Development: To help protect a child's psyche

At the third level, children especially need to be given emotional security so that they can plant their roots and mature into young men and women, while being afforded emotional security, and this aspect is mostly formed while in the house, under the care of one's direct family, extended family and friends whom one is brought into contact with on a daily basis.

In these and all other areas of life, the Noble Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt have given us direct words of guidance. For our purposes, we reflect on three such teachings and seek to better understand how we can implement them in our day to day lives with our children.

Lesson 1: Play with your children – AS A CHILD!

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, has said, *"Whoever has or is around children should play with them as a child!"*

مَنْ كَانَ عِنْدَهُ الصِّبْيَانُ فَلْيَتَمَصَّابْ لَهُ

An important part of play for young children is to play with their parents, and there should be sometime for this every day. A toy company some years ago asked a large number of five year olds what they would like for Christmas, and their survey found that many children wanted more time with their parents!

It is NOT about how many games or toys you get your children, it is not about having the latest video game system and an 80" LCD TV to play them on; it is not about how many satellite dishes and thousands of "on demand" channels you give your children, nor is it about anything else which you

THINK they want – if the survey noted above is correct, then children just wanted MORE TIME with their parents.

Many times, parents are too busy with work commitments, business trips, personal engagements and trying to save the world and they don't have enough time for their children and so they let them be baby-sat with electronics. This then becomes a very affordable way to “deal” with our children, however cutting ourselves off from our children and their day to day lives will definitely cause issues in the future. The father or mother who “today” don't have time for their children will find that tomorrow, when their children are in their teens, they will not have any time for their parents.

Lesson 2: Fulfill your promises!

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, has said, *“Have love for your children and show compassion towards them and when you promise them something, then live up to your promise since indeed they do not recognize you except as the one who sustains them.”*

أَجِبُوا الصِّبْيَانَ وَارْحَمُوهُمْ وَإِنَّا وَعَدْتُمُوهُمْ شَيْئًا فَفُوا لَهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يَدْرُونَ إِلَّا أَنَّكُمْ تَرْزُقُونَهُمْ

Kids live in their emotions, and when they hear something being promised to them, they get very excited. They can picture the promise happening and keep it with the mind in a way that is much more powerful than we are able to. For this reason, they will not ever forget what you promise them! So do not even think about making a promise that you might not be able to keep.

How many times have we as parents loaded up the car to go on a trip out of town and sometime during our travel, the kids begin to get bored or fidgety after being in their car seat for so long. They begin to fuss about and in order to calm them down or “keep them quiet”, the father will promise the children an ice cream or a donut or some toy if they just “be quiet”.

However once the children go back to reading or playing and the opportunity arises for the father or mother to fulfill their promise, they back-track and do not live up to their side of the bargain! In many instances, the only reason the parents or caregivers make such a false promise is to keep the children quiet and the parents have no desire or intention to actually fulfill their side of the bargain.

This is something which, as the Prophet has shown has is something which needs to stop as the children look to their parents as their only source of nourishment. They don't really “fully understand” Allah and that that He is the provider or that it is through Him that we are granted blessings – they only look to the parents as their means of survival and if we break this bond with them and are dishonest towards them, who knows the outcomes such an act will have on them.

In addition, from a Quranic perspective, fulfilling one's promise is an obligation which Allah makes reference to many times in the Qur'an that a believer is one who “fulfills his promise” and that he will be

questioned on the Resurrection Day about promises which he made but did not keep – so not only will this affect a parent’s own spiritual ranking, but it will also affect the children’s perception of the parents and ultimately the religion.

Lesson 3: Teach your Children the Essence of Faith!

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, has said, “*Acquaint your children with religious teachings (of Islam) before the disbelievers get to them.*”

بَادِرُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ بِالْحَدِيثِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَسْبِقَكُمْ إِلَيْهِمُ الْمُرْجِيَةُ

When you learn and review your faith and how you worship, especially its rituals and traditions, then review with your spouse what is of particular importance to you. Remember that your younger children will not understand many theological concepts of your faith, but they will develop their faith through words and actions and conversations with you and your spouse.

It is of vital importance that we instill Islamic teachings into our children as soon as possible – even before they come into this world when the mother is pregnant; however the “first” madressa lesson of our children should come when they arrive into this world and the proud parent recites the Adhan and Iqamah in the child’s right and left ears respectively.

Sadly however, from this day forward, the teachings of the faith are left to the “community leaders”, the Madressa or others, as the parents are either too busy or do not have the prerequisite knowledge to teach even the fundamental basics to their children – and this is something which needs to stop.

Granted that parents may not be religious authorities of the faith, however they need to know enough to teach their children and to get them on the path of learning and wanting to delve deeper into Islamic knowledge.

For many, this will not be done through books or magazines, but just “living Islam” on a daily basis; for example, ensuring that the children are made aware of prayer times either through an Adhan alarm clock, computer software or the father/mother giving the Adhan; making sure that the children perform wudhu or at least go through the motions and are then encouraged to stand and make the salat in Jamaat AT HOME on a regular basis; helping the children learn the recitation of the Qur’an and different supplications; taking the children to Umrah, Ziyarat, etc... to further acquaint them with the religion – these are all simple ways that the family can grow together in Islam – and remember that, “The family that prays together, stays together.”

We close with a stern warning from Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, in a statement which he made which should make all fathers and mothers think very carefully about their role as parents and guardians of children.

The Prophet, peace be upon him and his family once looked towards some young children and said, “Woe be upon the children of the latter days from that which their fathers will do (to them).” It was said, ‘O Messenger of Allah! From their fathers who are polytheists? He replied, ‘No! From their fathers who are believers however they do not teach them anything from the (religious) obligations and whatever they teach their children from the (transient) world, they only teach them that amount which will allow them to “get by” with ease. Indeed, I am not from them, nor are they from me.’”

أَنَّهُ نَظَرَ إِلَى بَعْضِ الْأَطْفَالِ فَقَالَ وَيْلٌ لِأَطْفَالِ آخِرِ الزَّمَانِ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ فَقِيلَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مِنْ آبَائِهِمُ الْمُشْرِكِينَ. فَقَالَ لَا مِنْ آبَائِهِمُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لَا يُعَلِّمُونَهُمْ شَيْئاً مِنَ الْفَرَائِضِ وَإِذَا تَعَلَّمُوا أَوْلَادَهُمْ مَنَعُوهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُمْ بِعَرَضٍ يَسِيرٍ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا فَأَنَا مِنْهُمْ بَرِيءٌ وَهُمْ مِنِّي بَرَاءٌ.

This powerful statement of the Prophet of Mercy is important for numerous reasons as he focuses on both aspects of life – this transient world and also the spiritual teachings. He shows us in this short saying that it is not enough for the father (and mother) to only focus on “spiritual teachings” – although these are extremely important and all parents must ensure that they impart the religion and its comprehensive nature to the next generation, but also that the Prophet was looking at fathers who did not even give their children knowledge of the world which we live in!

We know that our societies are extremely complex and day after day, governments enact laws and change parts of the system to such an extent that it is sometimes impossible to keep up – them knowing fully well that the masses do not have enough time to constantly review these, and will be easy prey for bureaucracy, however those things which we can do to help our children in this world and to give them that head start are things which we need to take into consideration to teach them.

There are many life skills which are not taught in the public school system; there are even many more things which need to impart to our children but are not done in a Madressa system – so where can our children go to find such gleams of wisdom? Do we expect them to Google everything for an answer!?

Most likely they will go to their friends – some of which may not have the correct moral system and may teach them things but not necessarily thing which we would like for them to engage in – and this can result in the spiritual destruction of their souls.

Thus, we need to ensure that we do our best to teach our children about the world we are living in and how to maneuver around the system and its intentionally designed pitfalls and caveats.

At the appropriate times, we should teach our children the basics of the economic policy, banking specifics so that we can gear them to understand such things which they will require when they are on their own; we should talk to them about the taxation laws, etc... and in summary, all of the things which we have used in our lives and continue to require on a daily basis, so that they are never caught in the quagmire or trying to swim through the legal jargon of life.

Granted that things change from our generation to the next generation and what may hold true today may not be the same for our children, however we can do our best to equip them with the prerequisites to be able to enter into the spiritual and temporal worlds with both feet firmly placed in the footsteps of the Qur'an, the Prophetic traditions as expounded upon by the noble Ahlul Bayt, peace be upon all of them.

May Allah help us all in this journey of life.

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