

ARTICLE

The Role of Parents as Role Models to their Children

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Holy Quraan: O You Who Believe, Save Yourself and Your Children from the Fire (Chap. 66, Vs. 6)

The role of parents in the upbringing of children is undoubtedly extremely important.

The Prophet (SA) has told us in clear terms that each one of us is a guardian and each will be questioned concerning that over which we have guardianship.

Our responsibility as parents is to protect our children, provide for them and ensure that they are given love, clothing, shelter and a safe Islamic environment. We are supposed to be the barrier between them and all the evil falsehood surrounding them which can penetrate their hearts.

Imam Ghazali (RA) writing about good conduct said that the training of a child's character and conduct is of supreme importance. Allah entrusted the children in the hands of their parents. The heart of a child is bright like a jewel; and soft like a candle and free from all impressions. It is like soft clay in which any seed can grow.

Therefore we as parents have to decide what is good for our children and what is not and this must be done with the knowledge that the stimuli we expose them to are the influences that mould them for life.

One of these main influences is education. It is essential and the Prophet (SA) has indicated in a hadith that there is no gift out of the gifts of parents to a child superior to a good, liberal education. Of course we are all aware of this fact and many of us begin to plan and save for our children's education soon after their birth. Yet is this the kind of education that the hadith refers to? In fact the first education our child needs is that of the understanding of the oneness of Allah and the necessity in worshipping Him only.

Unfortunately most of our schools are secular or under the control of various Denominational Boards and therefore it is not farfetched that our children can become confused about such important concepts as who is the Creator, Prophethood and Heaven and Hell.

In addition to the confusion of the differences in ideology between Islam and other religions, there is also the problem of dealing with the difference in culture. Islam is not just a religion but a way of life that gives recommendations for us as Muslims in all spheres of activity. Islam has guidance for us for our dress, food, interactions between the sexes, and allowable forms of entertainment. Many times the prevailing culture goes against the laws of Islam. For example the Prophet (SA) has said in a hadith (saying), The one who wears clothing for name and fame in this world, Allah will clothe him with clothes of disgrace on the Day of Judgement. Yet we are quite aware that our society is always highlighting fashion and brand names. Our children are pressured into dressing in a particular way or wearing a popular brand. If they choose a different style or abandon fashion altogether they will be subjected to ridicule and abuse and labeled a misfit.

This pressure is not only from peers but comes frequently from the media. Fashion, trends and products are advertised in such a way that a young person feels isolated and unequal if they do not participate in them. For example if you see an advertisement for cigarettes you will probably see young, good looking people having a good time and "taking a pull". The obvious subliminal message is that to be identified with this "cool" bunch, you have to smoke too! You will never see the reality of people contracting cancer or giving it to others through smoking.

Another of the great influences over our children is television and by extension Cable TV, videos, cinema, DVDs etc. We may see these things as simple forms of entertainment but in reality they are a lot more. In the first instance many scholars consider these things to be Haraam. How could it be not permissible to look at a non Mahram woman (one to whom a man can marry) except a glance yet we can look for hours at a woman on TV and vice versa. In addition, movies transmit culture, opinion, and morality as seen in the eyes of the film maker. In almost all cases these differ from the Islamic perspective. Again our youth are instructed in one way by their parents and religion and in another by the movies, cartoons, even documentaries they watch.

The movie industry and the music – which is also not permissible also- also create in young minds images which are meant for youth to become affixed to. Just as a person can stare for hours at stars in the skies, there are real life 'stars' presented to our youth to attract them to a particular lifestyle, one rich in materialism, lacking in morality and most of all one in which there is no higher authority to be accountable to. The fact is that today many of our children are so acquainted with the lives and lifestyles of these stars that they can relay all kinds of information about them, but concerning the Prophet of Allah (SA) they hardly know anything. The Prophet (SA) said in a hadith "Whosoever imitates a people becomes one of them". This means that if we follow those who differ from the way shown to us by the Prophet (SA), we shall surely go astray and earn the wrath of Allah (SWT).

The scenario presented above does have a solution, but it lies on the shoulders of the parents. The first phase of the solution is to recognize the problem. Understand very clearly that our children are in danger of being swallowed up by a culture that largely opposes our Islamic culture. We have to do something and we have to do it now.

After recognition the next step is action. A wise poet said:

"A child preserves whatever he is shown and does not forget it, because his heart is like a clear crystal. Inscribe in his heart whatever you desire and he will soon relate it from memory.

Therefore we need present to our children the true picture of the Islamic personality. This is accomplished by learning about the life of the Prophet of Islam (SA).

Allah (SWT) has told us in the Quraan: "there is for you in the Messenger of Allah a good example". (Chap. 33 Vs 21). Similarly it is recorded that when the wife of the Prophet (SA) was asked about his character she said it the Quraan itself, meaning that his lifestyle was an example of what the Quraan teaches us. We cannot therefore say that we are unaware about how to behave, interact and deal with people. Nor can we assume ignorance about what is the objective and priorities of life in this world. Between the Quraan, Ahadith and Seerah we are not bereft of guidance. Our shortfall is in our application of what we know and what we choose to learn. Now we know that our failings do not just impact on us but on our children also. They are in our care, we love them and wish them the best. How can we allow them to go astray?

We need therefore to learn Islam, practice it, love this religion and become role models for our children so that at least we can tell Allah (SWT) that we tried to heed His warning to save ourselves and our families from the Fire.