

Chapter 3: Training through Deeds, not Just Talk

Most parents think that oral instructions and occasional talk about dos and don'ts is sufficient for good upbringing of children. They presume that the upbringing of the child is thus taken care of and they do not have to do anything about the upbringing of the child concerning other walks of life. This is why such parents do not feel any need to think of the upbringing till the child is a tiny tot.

They say that the child is still a babe and is incapable of understanding anything about upbringing. When the child comes to the age of understanding they give a thought to its upbringing. It is the period in the life of a child when he starts discriminating between good and bad. While this thinking is incorrect, the child, as a matter of fact, is ready for the upbringing the day he is born. He gets trained every moment and his nature is moulded in a particular way.

Whether the parents are aware of this process or not the child does wait not for any initiative on their part. The child's active mind and other senses are like a camera, which keeps preserving images of what happens in its environment. A child of five to six years would have acquired a certain character. Good or bad habits would have got engrained in its nature and it would be a difficult task to bring about a change in his behavior.

The child, as a matter of fact, is a mimic. It tries to emulate its parents and the other inmates in its surroundings. The child views its parents with a degree of respect and makes efforts to copy their life style. Their actions become his yardstick for good and bad actions. The nature of a child is not cast in a mould but it takes the parents as the example to follow. The child depends more on the behavior of the parents as a model for its actions than any amount of sermonizing.

The daughter observes her mother and learns the niceties of house keeping. She sees her father and understands the nature of men. The boy takes lessons about life from his father's actions and from his mother's behavior he learns about the nature of women.

It is therefore necessary for responsible people to reform themselves at the outset and if they have any flaws in their behavior they should avoid them. In a nutshell, they should mould themselves into good human beings before they embark on the road to parenthood.

The parents should give a thought to what sort of offspring the desire to give to the society. If they feel that their child should be a morally upright, kind, humane, freedom loving and responsible person then they too have to be owning such characteristics that they set an example for him to emulate.

The mother wishes that her daughter should be responsible, kind, equanimous person who respects the feelings of her spouse then she should herself try to fit into these norms. The daughter will then observe the behavior pattern of the mother and automatically mould herself the same way. If the mother is an ill tempered, lazy, disorderly, untidy and selfish person then she cannot expect to train her daughter only through lecturing on the norms of good behavior.

Only those persons can competently train and bring up children properly who had similar upbringing themselves in their childhood. They will have better understanding of the nature and psyche of the children. The parents who have differences and pick up fights over trivialities will be incompetent in bringing up children. Similarly professional educators who have taken up the task only for the material remuneration, who are impatient, excitable and do not have an understanding of the child's nature and psyche will not be able to put their trainees on the right track.

Dr. Jalali writes:

"Whosoever has the responsibility of upbringing a child should occasionally do introspection on his own character and behavior, realize his responsibilities and try to correct his failings."

'Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

"The person who is in the lead should first reform himself and then try to correct others. Before teaching the norms of good behavior to others he should set an example himself. One who educates himself in learning and manners is more deserving of respect than he who only teaches the norms of good behavior to others."1

"You respect your elders that your children respect you."2

"If you wish to reform others, then commence the exercise with reforming yourself. If you like to correct others and keep yourself flawed it will be the biggest blemish."3

"When the talking tongue is silent on sermonizing and the actions of the sermonizer speak for themselves, then no ears can keep the sermon out and nothing is more effectively beneficial than this."4

One lady writes in a letter:

"... my parents' character has deeply impressed me. They have always been kind to their children. I never found any flaw in their words or deeds. We also acquired this habit. I cannot forget their good character and behavior. Now that I am a mother my endeavor is to see that I don't do any thing in the presence of the children, which is not considered good. My parent's character is the example to be

emulated in my life. I try to see that my children too are brought up the same way."

Another lady wrote in a letter:

".... When I recapitulate my past life I recall that my mother used to argue and shout on trivial matters. Now that I am a mother I feel that with a little difference my condition is nearly the same as my mother's was. All her negative manners have become a part of my character. The strange problem is that however much I try to reform myself I am unable to make much progress. Definitely it is proved in my case that the parents' character and behavior has far reaching effect on the moulding of the character of their children. The saying, therefore, is correct that a mother with the good training of her children can transform the world."

1. As quoted in the edited work, Nahj al balaghah

2. Ghurar al Hukm, p.546

3. Ghurar al Hukm, p. 278

4. Ghurar al Hukm, p.232

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