

Chapter 44: Independence

There are plenty of parents who think that restricting or denying any freedom to the children is good upbringing. They think that the children are incapable of distinguishing between good and bad. They don't have enough wisdom and if they are given some independence, they might go astray. Such parents start thinking for the child and make all the decisions for him.

They try to keep control over the child's eating, playing and other activities. They want to model the child's life according to their own thinking. They believe that the child doesn't have any right to independence and freedom. He should not do anything without the express permission of the parents.

Whatever the parents decide, the child must do implicitly without a whimper. Whatever the parents decide is wrong, the child must stop doing without any complaint. The children have no say in the plan of upbringing charted by such parents. Earlier, most families used to follow this policy for upbringing their children. They used to bring up the children with a iron hand. Even these days there are families that follow this practice of their forbears.

Although such has been the practice in the past, and is still followed by some families, it is not a desirable trend. It has many drawbacks and lacunae. There is always a possibility that with such training the children might remain comfortable, quiet and obedient to the parents. But they grow into timid persons devoid of self-confidence. Their inventive and innovative instincts will become dormant. They will not have the courage to take up important and difficult tasks in hand. They are also not capable of becoming leaders.

But they will be habituated of taking orders and bearing ill treatment stoically. When they grow up, they are not able to overcome this defect easily. They carry a hitch in their psyche that might later on be the cause of several psychological ailments. It is also possible that such persons develop sadistic tendencies and become tyrannical with their children and others.

Many intellectuals and psychologists have started a campaign against this cruel practice of upbringing and are advocating total freedom for the children. They advise the parents to leave the children free to act according to their own desire and liking. They say that the child should be free to do anything that he

desires, although it may not be the right thing in your eyes. This way the child will grow with an independent mind.

The famous psychologist Sigmund Freud believes in this method and has many followers in the East and the West. Lot of parents too followed this method in upbringing their children. They have given total freedom to their children and do not order them around. But this practice too is not totally right. It has several drawbacks. The children brought up this way don't believe in any restriction for doing what they decide to do. Such children generally will be selfish, excitable and of impudent nature. They think that others don't have any rights. They usurp others rights and privileges. They unnecessarily trouble their brothers and sisters. Such children tend to become a nuisance to their neighbors and others.

Because their desires are driven by total independence, they commit excesses towards others. Their expectations reach such a level that they will find it difficult to fulfill them. When such children grow into adults they expect others to obey them without any complaint. They don't want to be controlled by anyone else. When they notice that they are unable to get their way with others, then they become heart-broken

After having faced rebuffs in the society they become reclusive, or, to take revenge against their defeats they devise stratagems for tyranny and dangerous acts. Unrestricted freedom sometimes becomes hazardous too. Sometimes a child wishes to run dangerously on the road or to touch the live electrical wire. Thus, the two methods of upbringing, one that gives no freedom to the child and the other which recommends total freedom, are both fraught with glaring faults. The best path to follow in the matter of the upbringing of the child is to give him selective freedom.

Allah has endowed the human beings with different instincts and feelings that go to make the nature of a person. Some of these instincts are love, hate, bravery, fear etc. These are intrinsic feelings and notions endowed by Allah to all human beings for tackling the problems that confront them. These instincts go to make the individual's personality. In a free environment these instincts keep growing.

Fear is for escape from dangers. Anger helps in deciding to attack the adversary. Diligence is required for acquiring learning. A person who does not have the instinct of fear and anger in his nature will be an inferior person. It is not right to suppress these instincts in a child. In an atmosphere of freedom a child can make use of these instincts to advantage.

The Religion of Islam gives particular attention to the need for freedom. A few traditions are quoted here.

'Ali said:

"Don't become slave to others, Allah has given birth to you as a free person."¹

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq said:

"A person who has the following five qualities will be a successful person: First: Faith, Second: Wisdom,

Third: Morals, Fourth: Freedom, Fifth: Good behavior."

The Prophet of Islam said:

"The child is a ruler till he is seven years old, seven to fourteen years he is a subject and after fourteen years he is the deputy and adviser for his parents."²

But total freedom is not possible in the society. For one person's freedom, the freedom of others in the society cannot be compromised. The child must be made to understand early in life that without any restrictions one cannot live in the society.

Others too have some rights and privileges. For example: a child wants to play. Play is good for his training. He must have freedom to play games that suit his temperament. But while playing the child should be aware of the rights of others. He should exercise care that property of the neighbors is not damaged, the window-panes of buildings in the neighborhood are not broken. Therefore, he does have the freedom to play but this freedom is having some restrictions.

The child can exercise his instinct to get angry. He can defend himself by showing anger at proper time. But in the exercise of his anger he does not have the freedom to damage the property around him, cause some injury to others or heap insults at them.

The parents should devise a strategy for the upbringing of the child keeping in consideration his age, intelligence, strength and feelings. They should put his actions in two categories:

1. The actions that is desirable for him.
2. The actions that are taboo for him.

They should determine the limit for each type of action. Then they should give total freedom to the child for the desirable activity so that he fully exercises his instincts in performing these activities without any restriction. The child should be free to think and act. Not only the child should be given total freedom, but also on occasion he must be guided, if so required. But the acts which are taboo for the child, he should be strictly prevented from doing them.

If this attitude is adopted, neither will the freedom of the child be curbed nor his capabilities hindered. He will have the right amount of freedom and control to ensure that his instincts are utilized gainfully.

The parents should carefully determine the right and wrong acts that the child might do. The acts which are harmful to the family, which might cause harm to the persons or property, which are against the norms of *Shariah* and the law should be black-listed and the child should be strictly prevented from perpetrating them. For the right acts the child should be given total freedom. In performance of these good acts the child should be allowed to use his own thinking and intuition.

The rules of behavior should be determined keeping in view the strength of his body and mind, his thinking capacity. Care should be taken to set rules which are not harsh on the child.

The parents should be firm in their pronouncements to the child, "You can do this." "You must not do this."

The parents should keep aside unnecessary sentiments and emotions. They should abstain from doubts and suspicions so that the child understands its responsibilities and will not have any hesitation in fulfilling his duties.

Imam Hasan al Askari says:

"When a child disobeys his parents, and is impertinent to them, he will grow into an adult who is rebellious and insubordinate."³

The parents must both co-ordinate with one another to abstain from differences of opinion while dealing with the child. The differences amongst the parents can create doubts in the mind of the child.

¹. Bihar al-anwar, v77, p.214

². Wasail al-shiah, v 15, p. 195

³. Bihar al-anwar, v78, p. 374

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