

Chapter 67: The Child and Theological Education

The human beings are instinctively attracted towards God and religion. The fountainhead of this instinct is the human nature.

Allah says in the Holy Book:

“Then set thou thy face uprightly for (the right) religion, in natural devotion to the truth(following) the nature caused by God in which He hath made the people” (Qur’an, 30:30)

Every child, by nature, is a worshipper of God, but the influence of the external environment might bring about change in this condition; as the Prophet of Islam has said:

"Every child is born with Islamic Nature, but later on the parents might make him a Jew, a Christian or a Zoroastrian"¹

It is the responsibility of the parents to give birth to their child in such an environment that the naturally endowed instinct of Religion in him is properly nourished. The day a child comes into this world, he is attracted towards the Power that will provide him his needs. But the child will not have his understanding developed to an extent to express anything about the Focus of its attention.

But, in stages, the understanding dawns on the child. A child, who gets his upbringing in a religious family, starts recognizing Allah from around the age of four years. This is the age when different questions start cropping up in the mind of a child. Sometimes he utters the name of Allah. His questions indicate that his nature is awake and is keen to gather more and more information:

The child thinks about:

- Who made the sun?
- Who has created the moon and the stars?

- Does Allah love me?
- Does Allah like sweet things?
- Who brings the rain?
- Who gave birth to Dad?
- Is Allah listening to our talk?
- Can we talk with Allah over the 'phone?
- Where does Allah live?
- How is His face?
- Does Allah live in the skies?

From the age of four years the child starts to think of thousands of such questions. It is evident from these questions that the instinct of Godliness is awakening in the child. By asking these questions he tries to quench his thirst for knowledge. It is not known, at that tender age, what opinion the child has of Allah. He perhaps thinks that Allah is like his Dad, but is definitely bigger and more powerful. As the child grows, his understanding of Allah too grows.

The parents shoulder a big responsibility at this stage. They have to play a very critical role in shaping the beliefs of their child. If the parents are a little negligent at this stage, then they will be subject to heavy retribution on the Day of Judgment. They must try to carefully answer all the questions their little child asks. If they avoid answering the questions for some reason, they might cause the extinction of the child's urge for discovery. But it may not be easy to answer all the questions of the child. The answers shall have to be correct, short and narrated in simple words.

As the child grows, he will become capable of understanding more difficult information. The parents will have to prepare themselves to reply to the probable questions that the child might ask them. They should not give to the child any information that might be beyond his comprehension. Such answers might confuse the child instead of quenching his thirst for knowledge. The Theological education of the child should be such that he is able to grasp with ease.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq says:

“When the child is three years old, teach him to say ‘La ilaha illal Lah’ (There is no god, but Allah). Then leave him alone. When he is three years, seven months and twenty days; teach him to say Muhammad ar Rasool Allah (Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah). Leave him alone till he completes four years of age. Now teach him to say the *salawat* (the praises) of the Prophet (and his holy progeny).”²

Make the children learn to recite simple couplets about religious matters. This will be an interesting exercise for them. Then teach them about the Nubbuwat (the Prophethood) and Imamat (the Vicegerency). First the child must be told about the Prophet that he has been sent by Allah for the guidance of mankind.

Then they must be told about the Prophet's superior qualities and his exemplary way of life. Narrate to the child some interesting events of the Prophet's life. Then the child must be told about the Vicegerents of the Prophet for the continuity of the correct guidance of his people after him. All this information should be conveyed to the child in the form of short narrations to retain his continued interest.

About Qiyamat (the Doomsday) a child does not give early attention. He thinks that he and his parents will live happily forever. Talking to a child about death at that tender age may not be desirable. The child thinks that the people who died have gone on a long journey. Sometimes tragedies do take place in the families while the children are still small. In these circumstances the parents have to discreetly broach the subject of death with them. If, unfortunately, the child's Grandpa is dead, he might ask, ' Mom Where did Grandpa go?'

In such situations the facts must be explained to the child. The child can be told that his grand parent is no more. He has gone to the Other World. Every one who dies, goes to that World. If he were a good person in this life, he would rest in the Heaven where there are beautiful gardens. If the person who has died was a bad person in this life, he would go to the Hell which is full of fire. The child should be informed about the inevitability of death slowly. He must be told that this life is transient and everyone has to go to the Other World.

This informal instruction of the religious knowledge should continue till the child completes his primary, middle and higher levels of schooling.

1. Bihar al-anwar, v 3, p.281

2. Makarim al akhlaq, v 1, p. 254

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