

Chapter 75: Non Physical Punishments

Lots of parents prefer to give non-physical punishments to their children in times of need. For example, if a child misbehaves, he is locked in a dark room or a big trunk. Sometimes the parents shout and use bad language in anger when a child commits a mistake. The impact of such cruel punishments may not be far less than the physical punishments discussed in the previous chapter.

Imam ‘Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

“There are many types of punishments which have bigger impact than physical assault.”¹

It is possible that these punishments might be more severe on the minds of the children than the physical punishments. These punishments will injure the personality of the child and create elements of fear and restlessness in his nature. It has happened many a time that when a child is locked alone in a dark room, the effect on his nerves was so severe that he was not able to erase it from his mind for a major part of his life.

Some of the victims of such nervousness sometimes swoon under its effect. The parents should therefore refrain from giving such punishments to the children. Shouting and using foul language with the children is taboo (*haram*) and will have a very damaging impact on their upbringing. This might motivate the children to learn such foul language for their future lives.

But definitely there are several non-physical punishments that will not have any negative impact on the minds of the children, and at the same time they are very effective in correcting them. For example, if a child misbehaves or doesn’t give proper attention to his studies, the parents stop speaking with him for a time or don’t take him out on picnics.

Sometimes, as a punishment the parents don’t take a child out to a party where the family is invited. Sometimes, as a reprimand, a child is made to miss a meal. At other time, as a corrective, the child is given some difficult task to do. These punishments, used judiciously, might be very effective in controlling and correcting the child. They will not be accompanied with any deleterious effect on the mind and the nerves of the child.

But punishments are punishments. There is one definite defect in punishments that they are not much effective for correcting the intrinsic defects in the nature of a child. With the fear of punishment the child might momentarily, or for some time, behave differently and properly. Or he might cleverly not make the same mistake openly. But when he finds a suitable opportunity, he might be up to the same behavior for which he has been reprimanded in the past.

The punishments, therefore, don't cut away the cause of the misdemeanors of the child. It is possible that sometimes the child might take shelter behind lying and stealth. To make effective and judicious of the non-physical punishments, a few points are suggested to the parents and the mentors of the children:

1. The punishment should be well thought out and commensurate with the misdemeanor of the child. Ensure that the punishment is not more than the flaw or the misbehavior of the child. If the child thinks that the punishment was unjust, he might react in his defense and start to be rebellious and head-strong.
2. The punishment should not be such that the child starts thinking that the parents are his enemies and they don't love him.
3. If the child has committed something wrong unintentionally, he should not be punished. Despite this, if the child is punished, it might have negative impact on his feelings and his mind.
4. Punishments should not become an every day affair if the parents wish them to be effective. If punishments are repeated too often, the child might turn into a compulsive offender. Then the punishments will not have any effect on him.

Imam 'Ali has said:

“Reprimand and punishment in excess might make one stubborn,”²

5. The child can be punished for a single act and not on a collective basis for his past Misbehaviors. Otherwise the child will be confused as to why he is being punished. He will not repeat an act, only if he knows that he was punished for doing that. It is always better that the punishment is immediately after the commitment of the act.
6. To the extent possible, efforts must be made to see that the punishment is according to the mistake he has committed. For example, if the child has fallen behind in doing the exercises of mathematics, he must be ordered to complete the exercise and not to copy the entire book of mathematics from start to end. If the child has carelessly thrown away his school bag, and the uniform, after returning from school, he must be asked to immediately arrange them properly in the right place.

As a punishment for this careless behavior he should not be threatened that he would not be taken to the dinner scheduled for that evening. If the child had misbehaved at a party, his punishment can be not

taking out to the next party and not stopping his allowance of the pocket money. If the child squanders his pocket money, then, as a punishment a similar amount may be cut from his next allowance.

7. After the punishment, the parents should not mention his mistake again and again. One person says that he complained about his son to Moosa bin Ja'far. He replied, "Don't beat him. Just be cross with him But this attitude of yours should not be for long."³

8. If you wish to punish a child, don't compare him with other children. Don't recount the qualities of the other children to him. You cannot reform the child through this attitude. You might give rise to the feeling of jealousy in the mind of the child.

One person writes in his memoirs thus:

"In my childhood my father used to shout at me very much. He used to insult me in the presence of relatives and my friends. He always recounted others achievements in front of me. He always looked for an occasion to belittle me. He considered me an inferior person. However much he insulted me, I became more stubborn. I lost interest in my studies. I had developed an inferiority complex. I started shirking work. I was not willing to accept any responsibility. My personality was injured because of constant nagging by my father. Today I am a lazy and lonely person"

^{1.} Gharar al hukm, p. 415

^{2.} Ghurar al hakm, p. 70

^{3.} Gharar al hukm, p. 70

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