

## Lesson 1: Training of Children

The duty of every parent is to train the child in the right way. Training means teaching and guiding. Training also means producing required changes in a person. It is not enough for parents to cater for the physical needs of the child. They need to give the child an awareness and knowledge, help him gain good characteristics, and develop a virtuous personality. Such training of children has great benefits for the child as well as for the society in which he lives. Although many people have an influence on the training of a child, the first and most important trainers are the parents.

The guidance that a parent gives his child is vital for the progress of the child. Although the child may not appreciate it at the time, a loving parent knows that it is incumbent upon him to make his child learn from his own knowledge and experience. This enables the child to avoid the mistakes the parent may have made, and benefit from his wisdom. Imam 'Ali (a) wrote a will to his son Imam Hasan (a), advising him on how to live in this world. In the will he explains why he felt it necessary to advise his son:

*I found you a part of myself, rather I found you my whole, so much that if anything befell you, it was as though it befell me, and if death came to you, it was as though it came to me. Consequently your affairs meant to me as my own matters would mean to me. So I have written this piece of advice as an instrument of help . . .*

*Certainly, the heart of a young man is like uncultivated land. It accepts whatever is strewn on it. So I hastened to mould you properly before your heart hardens up and your mind gets occupied. So that you may be ready to accept through your intelligence, the results of experiences of others and be saved from going through these experiences yourself.*

*Nahjul Balagha*, Letter 31

### Various Definitions of Training

1. An action or a series of actions carried out on those who have not yet achieved full (physical and emotional) growth, to guide them in their thoughts and manners in order to create a strong and balanced human being.

2. A process to help the growth of mental and spiritual powers of the human being to go towards perfection.
3. An informed and thoughtful process which has the aim of guiding, changing, and achieving the full potential of, another.
4. Raising a human being to be useful and beneficial for society.
5. Islamic training can be defined as providing the necessary guidance and discipline through awakening potential virtues in the human being, and helping them develop.

### Conclusions from the above definitions

1. Training is an informed and aware process.
2. Training has an aim.
3. Training has a plan and a strategy.
4. It is a movement towards perfection.
5. It brings about change for the better.
6. It is a continuous process.

Parents train their children throughout the time they are with them. The correct form of training would take into consideration the above definitions of training. This has a significant effect on the children, and can help create a virtuous personality. Inherited traits may be overcome or diminished through training.

### Parents as Trainers

Parents have a two fold influence on the characters of their children.

**Through Inheritance:** Many characteristics are passed on from the genes of the parents to the children. These genes could pass on characteristics of the grandparents and ancestors of the parents. Families share many qualities in common, and the role of inheritance cannot be overlooked. Physical and mental traits are passed on. The physical appearance of the child, his intelligence, his health or the lack of it, are often a result of inheritance.

**Through Contact:** The first contact the child has with the mother is in the womb. This period of time also has an effect on the child. The physical health of the womb and the mental and emotional health of the mother during pregnancy play an important role.

The most important training however, is done during the years the child spends with the parents. They are his first teachers, They give him an awareness, a world view which will always color his thoughts and opinions. Many great aspirations, courageous behavior, noble manners as well as crooked personalities

have been formed as an effect of parents. The first home a child knows should be a source of love and respect for him, a place that has order and arrangement. When a child feels secure and safe in his home and is assured of the love of his parents, he can begin to develop mentally and emotionally.

The most productive years for effective training are the first five years. During this time a child is willing to imitate blindly, and will undoubtedly carry out the actions of his parents. He will pick up behavior and forms of speech that become a part of him. Although it is important to note that this process will continue throughout his forming years, the first few years will form the foundation and base of his character.

During this time he is almost continuously with the parents (except for those who are sent to day-cares etc.). Later on, school, friends and other activities will take him away from the parents for lengthy periods of time. It must also be realized that the role of the mother during this time is more important than the role of the father, as most of the time is spent with her.

## **Aspects of Training**

Many parents would like to train their children in the right way. But they are unsure of what exactly they should do in order to carry out comprehensive and useful training. The following are some aspects of training every parent should cover.

### **Guidance**

A child must be guided towards what is right. This includes teaching of beliefs and actions of religion, good manners, and moral and social values. The child should be taught about healthy ways of living, having good relationships with others, living a useful life in terms of helping and serving others. This type of training is done through talking to the child, showing a good example, sending him to Madrasah and other places of religious learning, involvement with the religious community, and an awareness of the Muslim Ummah.

The age and ability of the child must be kept in mind. Parents can use the help of teachers, relatives, community members, books, and other useful resources for this aspect of training.

### **Self-Control**

A child should be taught that a human being is different from an animal. The value of the *Aql* cannot be underestimated and the child must learn to control his desires and wants. Emotions like anger, jealousy, greed, selfishness, etc. will all raise their ugly head. It is the duty of parents to deal with these emotions and help the child control them.

Thus it is wrong for parents to give in to every demand of the child, or to allow him to vent his anger when he is thwarted. It is part of training to help a child deal with disappointment and failure, to prevent him from being egoistic and selfish. Many children these days feel the world should be at their feet, and

their needs should be met on demand. Even when possible, it is wrong to give a child all he wants for it will create a personality that cannot bear denial.

## Change

Although it is true that children inherit traits such as shyness, fear, etc. it is not true that these cannot be changed. Good training can help a child overcome certain characteristics that could hamper his progress in life. Parents need to first assess what negative traits are present in the child, and then plan how to overcome them. Useful tactics may include discussions with child, reading or narrating stories where people overcame these behaviors, and encouraging the child to decrease the trait.

So, for example, a shy child could be helped by being encouraged to mingle with others. In the beginning this could be with a small group of people, or people he is comfortable with. The child could be taught what to say, and how to control the fear to speak among others. Slowly the child will learn to overcome the shyness, or at least not allow it to control his life. This type of wise and gradual help is an important part of training.

## Exploiting Potential

Life is of great value. The Almighty has given each human being various talents and potentials. He has given the treasure of time in this world so humans can achieve great things. They will then have something to show for themselves for an entrance to a peaceful eternal abode. Through training parents can help their children to make the most of the talents and time that God has given them.

Children need to be taught about the harms of wasting time, of the evils of useless and vain pastimes. They should be encouraged to develop useful hobbies and pastimes. Their interests in various areas could be exploited. This includes their potential in religious fields such as Tilawat (recitation) of the Holy Qur'an, memorizing the Qur'an, learning the Arabic language, research into Islamic subjects etc. Habits learnt in childhood last for a long time. If a child becomes accustomed to reading in his leisure time, this will probably become a lifetime habit. But the child who learns to switch on the television, and looks only to the television for entertainment and relaxation, will continue to do the same as an adult.

Thus it is the duty of the parents to encourage their children to be creative with their abilities. They need to introduce them to the world of achievement, where many young people can achieve a great deal. Most important, they need to be taught to refrain from useless and mindless pastimes.

## Lack of Training

No child can be brought up with a total lack of training. However parents differ in ways of training. Some parents believe that children will grow up and learn for themselves. It is unnecessary to burden them in their childhood years. Others think it is proper to expect children to be like adults, quick to understand

what is right and quicker to obey.

The correct view is in between. Children are not adults and need to be encouraged and guided. They will make mistakes and slip. The important thing is to continue the training and realize that it has an effect on the child, even if not immediate. Training of a child is a long process and no parent can expect that after a year or some years of training, the job will be over.

If every parent would realize the importance of good training, and work accordingly, society would become transformed. Characters would be molded in the right way, and the new generation would have strong moral and social values.

Many parents leave the job of training to teachers and society, not realizing that the education system today in most places is chillingly void of moral values. Society around the child is often immoral. Providing the right type of training is the primary duty of the parents.. Every child needs to be taught the right things, for he is not born with that awareness. By himself, it will take him a long time to learn true values, if ever.

## Wise Words

The Holy Prophet (S) is reported to have said, “The inheritance of Allah, the exalted, from His believing servant, is a child who will worship Him after him (his death).” Then he (the sixth Imam) recited the prayer of Nabi Zakariyya, ***My Lord, grant me from Yourself an heir to inherit me and inherit from the children of Ya’qub. (19:5).***

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a)

I have not asked my Lord for children with beautiful faces, nor for children with good figures, but I have asked my Lord for children who are obedient to Allah, who fear Him, so that when I look at him (one of them) and he is obedient to Allah, my eye is delighted.

Imam ‘Ali (a)

The right of a child over his parent is that he should give him a good name, make his manners good, and teach him the Qur’an.

Holy Prophet (S)