

Right n. 24: The Right of the Child

حق الولد

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ وَلَدِكَ فَتَعَلَّمَ أَنَّهُ مِنْكَ وَمُضَافٌ إِلَيْكَ فِي عَاجِلِ الدُّنْيَا بِخَيْرِهِ وَشَرِّهِ، وَأَنَّكَ مَسْئُولٌ عَمَّا وَلِيْتَهُ مِنْ حُسْنِ الْأَدَبِ وَالِدَلَالَةِ عَلَى رَبِّهِ وَالْمَعُونَةِ لَهُ عَلَى طَاعَتِهِ فِيكَ وَفِي نَفْسِهِ، فَمُثَابٌّ عَلَى ذَلِكَ وَمُعَاقِبٌ، فاعْمَلْ فِي أَمْرِهِ عَمَلَ الْمُتَزَيِّنِ بِحُسْنِ أَثَرِهِ عَلَيْهِ فِي عَاجِلِ الدُّنْيَا، الْمُعْذِرِ إِلَى رَبِّهِ فِيمَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ بِحُسْنِ الْقِيَامِ عَلَيْهِ وَالْأَخْذُ لَهُ مِنْهُ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

And the right of your child is that you should know that he is from you and he will be ascribed to you in this world due to both his good deeds and his evil deeds. And you are responsible for what has been entrusted to you in teaching him good conduct, and guiding him toward his Lord and helping him to obey Him on your behalf and for himself. Then you will be rewarded for so doing, and you will be punished.¹

Then regarding his affairs, act like one who will be proud of bringing him up in this world, and one who is excused by his Lord for what is between you and him for taking good care of him, and the good results you achieved. And there is no power but in God.

Imam Sajjad mentions the following points regarding the rights of children:

- 1 A father should not forget that the child is his and that the child's good or bad deeds will be ascribed to him.
- 2 A father is responsible for guiding the child to obey God, and to teach and educate him.
- 3 A father should not be indifferent to the result of the deeds of his child. There will be rewards for the child's good deeds, and punishment for the child's bad deeds for the father, too.
- 4 A father should do his best to raise the child so that his excuse is acceptable both to his child and God.

The rights of parents were presented in previous chapters. In this chapter, Imam Sajjad presents the rights of children incumbent upon parents. There is no doubt that the very foundation of each child starts when a couple gets married and realizes that the fruit of their love and mutual life will be the children that they have and raise. Some of the traits of the children are genetically inherited from their parents. Children are thus a reflection of their parents' characteristics.

The issue of genetic inheritance of traits also holds true in plants and animals, and is not to be discussed here further. Once by God's will the child is born into this material world, Islam considers the parents highly responsible towards him. They should first realize the importance of this issue, and seek God's help in fulfilling their heavy duties. We will briefly discuss these duties here.

To successfully raise children, parents should consider the following two important points. First, they should revive the child's potential talents, and secondly they should work to eliminate the child's wrong or harmful inclinations. A good teacher is one who studies and discovers the child's talents and uses practical and scientific methods to develop them to the point of their perfection and application. He also destroys the potentially bad hereditary inclinations left over in the child from his parents or grandparents. Imam Sadiq said:

وَيَجِبُ لِلْوَالِدِ عَلَى وَالِدِهِ ثَلَاثُ خِصَالٍ: اخْتِيَارُهُ لِوَالِدَتِهِ وَتَحْسِينُ اسْمِهِ وَالْمُبَالَغَةُ فِي تَأْدِيبِهِ.

“Three rights for the child are incumbent upon his father: selecting a (good) mother for him, giving him a good name, and exerting the utmost effort in raising him well.”²

Thus Imam Sadiq has considered that parents must exert all efforts to raise their children. Imam Sajjad said:

وَأَعِنِّي عَلَى تَرْبِيَتِهِمْ وَتَأْدِيبِهِمْ وَبَرِّهِمْ.

“O God! Please help me in raising and educating my children and making them good people.”³

Thus, we realize that raising children is a hard task and everyone should seek God's help in this important affair.

The Rights of Children

Children have certain rights over their parents from the time that they are born. The first right relates to naming them. This right has been mentioned in many traditions. The Prophet said:

مِنْ حَقِّ الْوَالِدِ عَلَى الْوَالِدِ أَنْ يُحْسِنَ اسْمَهُ وَيُحْسِنَ أَدَبَهُ.

“Among the rights of child over the father are that he chooses a good name for him, and raises him well.”[4](#)

The Prophet said:

سَمُّوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ أَسْمَاءَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَأَحْسِنُ الْأَسْمَاءَ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ وَعَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ

“Give your children the names of the Prophets. The best names are Abdullah and Abd al-Rahman.”[5](#)

The Prophet said:

مِنْ حَقِّ الْوَالِدِ عَلَى وَالِدِهِ ثَلَاثَةٌ: يُحَسِّنُ اسْمَهُ وَيُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَةَ وَيُزَوِّجُهُ إِذَا بَلَغَ

“Children have three rights over their father: that he give them a good name, teach them how to read and write, and marry them off when they mature.”[6](#)

Imam Ali said:

حَقُّ الْوَالِدِ عَلَى الْوَالِدِ أَنْ يُحَسِّنَ اسْمَهُ وَيُحَسِّنَ أَدَبَهُ وَيُعَلِّمَهُ الْقُرْآنَ

“The right of a child incumbent upon his father is that the father should choose a good name for him and teach him good etiquette and the Qur’an.”[7](#)

Changing bad Names by the Prophet

The Prophet Muhammad changed bad names of people and places to good ones and freed the people from bad feelings and humiliation due to having a bad name. Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of his father that the Prophet changed the ugly names of people and towns.[8](#)

Umar had a daughter whom he had named Asiyah meaning sinner. The Prophet changed her name to Jamileh meaning beautiful.[9](#) In another tradition we read: “Abi Rafe’ narrated that the daughter of Umm-Salma’ was named Barrah meaning good-doer. The Prophet of God changed her name to Zaynab.”[10](#)

The Prophet did this since that name connotated selfishness and some people said that she wants to claim to be pure. The Prophet changed her name to Zaynab to end the people’s humiliating her. Ahmad ibn Haytham asked Imam Ridha : “Why did the Arabs put the names of animals such as dogs, wild cats, tigers, etc. on their children?” Imam Ridha replied: “The Arabs were fighters. They named their children this way so as to frighten their enemies when they called their children during fighting.”[11](#)

Bad Names: A Cause of Humiliation

The head of an Arab tribe was named Jareyah that means a kind of boa. He was frank and strong. His relatives and him were displeased with Mu`awiyah's oppressive rule and Mu`awiyah had sensed this. Mu`awiyah decided to humiliate him. Once when Mu`awiyah faced him,

Mu`awiyah said: "How lowly were you in your tribe that they named you a boa." Jareyah immediately replied: "And how lowly you were in your tribe that they named you Mu`awiyah meaning a female dog." Mu`awiyah got angry and said: "Shut up. You have no mother!" Jareyah replied: "I do have a mother. By God we have hearts which beat in your hatred." Then Mu`awiyah who was defeated said: "May God not increase the people like you." [12](#)

Another example is related to a man who lived at the time of Mu`awiyah. He was the head of his tribe and his name was Sharik ibn Aoor. The word "Sharik" means partner in Arabic, and it is not a good name. His father's name was Aoor that means "one with a defective eye" in Arabic.

Once when he went to see Mu`awiyah, Mu`awiyah said: "Your name means "partner" but there are no partners for God. You are the son of the man with a defective eye. However, a healthy man is better than one with a defective eye. You are ugly, and beauty is better than ugliness. What is the reason that the people of your tribe have chosen you as their chief?"

Sharik replied: "By God your name is Mu`awiyah which means a dog! You barked and they called you Mu`awiyah [13](#). You are the grandson of Harb that means fighting, but peace is better than fighting. You are the son of Sakhr that means rocks, but dirt is always better than rocks. How can you be the Commander of the Faithful?" This really hurt Mu`awiyah and he ordered him to depart. [14](#)

Ugliness or physical defects cause a sense of humiliation. Ugly names do the same. It is for this reason that we are instructed in Islam to choose proper names for our children. Choosing proper names will be very influential on their personality, and will make them immune to psychological complexes.

So far, we have discussed the duties of parents to choose good names for their children. Next, we will discuss the next duty of parents in educating their children and acquainting them with God. Let us see what is said in this regard in the traditions.

How Loving Affects Child Development

There is no doubt that children need both food and love to grow. They receive their food from the milk they get when they are breast-fed by their mother. This is the perfect food that God has prepared for their physical growth. The food for their spirit consists of the training and care they receive from their parents. Children need both food and love. The Prophet said:

أَحِبُّوا الصِّبْيَانَ وَارْحَمُوهُمْ فَإِذَا وَعَدْتُمُوهُمْ فَفُوا لَهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يَرَوْنَ إِلَّا أَنْتُمْ رَازِقُوهُمْ

“Love your children, and be kind and merciful to them. Fulfill your promises made to them since children consider their father to be the one who provides for their sustenance.” [15](#)

Loving the children and fulfilling promises made to them are stressed here so that they do not learn to break their promises. There are many ways to express your love. One way is to kiss and hug them when they are small. The Prophet said:

قَبِّلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَإِنَّ لَكُمْ بِكُلِّ قُبْلَةٍ دَرَجَةٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ مَا بَيْنَ كُلِّ دَرَجَتَيْنِ خَمْسِمِائَةِ عَامٍ

“Kiss your children. There is an elevation in your rank in Paradise as a reward for each kiss. Each raise in rank is as much as five hundred years.” [16](#)

Imam Ali said:

قُبْلَةُ الْوَالِدِ رَحْمَةٌ وَقُبْلَةُ الْمَرْأَةِ شَهْوَةٌ وَقُبْلَةُ الْوَالِدَيْنِ عِبَادَةٌ وَقُبْلَةُ الرَّجُلِ أَحَاهُ دِينٌ

“Kissing the child is mercy. Kissing the woman is desire. Kissing parents is worship, and kissing one’s believing brethren is religion.” [17](#)

Kissing is restricted for others. Imam Sadiq said:

إِذَا بَلَغَتِ الْجَارِيَةُ سِتًّا سِنِينَ فَلَا تُقَبَّلُهَا، وَالغُلَامُ لَا تُقَبَّلُ الْمَرْأَةَ إِذَا جَاوَزَ سَبْعَ سِنِينَ

“Men should not kiss girls who are older than six and women should not kiss boys who are older than seven.” [18](#)

The Prophet loved his grandsons and kissed them often. Once a man named Aqra ibn Habes was present there when the Prophet kissed them. The man said: “I have ten sons, but I have never kissed any of them.” The Prophet said: “So why has God taken love out of your heart?” Therefore we realize that the Prophet considered that man’s act of not kissing his children to be a form of lack of love.” [19](#)

Excessive Love

Although Islam advises us to love our children, it admonishes us against excessive love, and its possible side effects. Imam Baqir said:

شَرُّ الْآبَاءِ مَنْ دَعَاهُ بِرُّهُ إِلَى الْإِفْرَاطِ وَشَرُّ الْأَبْنَاءِ مَنْ دَعَاهُ التَّقْصِيرُ إِلَى الْعُقُوقِ.

“The worst of fathers is one whose kindness (to his children) drives him to excess. The worst of children is one whose negligence leads him to undutifulness (towards parents).” [20](#)

Excessive love for the children might spoil them and make them haughty and selfish. Imam Ali said:

شَرُّ الْأُمُورِ الرِّضَا عَنِ النَّفْسِ.

“The worst of affairs is to be pleased with oneself.” [21](#)

Daughters are the Best Children

Parents should thank God for the children that God grants them. They should realize that children are God’s trust in them. They should realize their heavy responsibility and exert all efforts to educate and raise them. The Immaculate Imams expressed that girls should be treated more kindly than boys are. This is really stressed in the sayings of the Prophet and the Immaculate Imams . Consider the following tradition in this regard.

Hazieh Yamani quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

خَيْرُ أَوْلَادِكُمُ الْبَنَاتُ.

“Your daughters are your best children.” [22](#)

Imam Sadiq said:

الْبَنَاتُ حَسَنَاتٌ وَالْبَنُونَ نِعْمَةٌ؛ فَالْحَسَنَاتُ يُثَابُ عَلَيْهَا وَالنِّعْمَةُ يُسْأَلُ عَنْهَا.

“Daughters are good deeds, and sons are blessings. Good deeds will be rewarded and blessings will be questioned about.” [23](#)

The Prophet was given the glad tidings that God had granted him a daughter. His companions were so upset about the news that one could notice it from their faces. The Prophet said:

مَا لَكُمْ؟ رِيحَانَةٌ أَشْمُهُا وَرِزْقُهَا عَلَى اللَّهِ.

“Why are you so upset? A daughter is like a flower that I will smell. God will give her daily bread.” [24](#)

God's Prophet said:

نَعْمَ الْوَلَدُ الْبَنَاتُ الْمُخَدَّرَاتُ. مَنْ كَانَتْ عِنْدَهُ وَاحِدَةً جَعَلَهَا اللَّهُ سِتْرًا لَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ، وَمَنْ كَانَتْ عِنْدَهُ اثْنَتَانِ أَدْخَلَهُ اللَّهُ بِهِمَا الْجَنَّةَ، وَإِنْ كُنَّ ثَلَاثَةً أَوْ مِثْلَهُنَّ مِنَ الْأَخْوَاتِ وَضِعَ عَنْهُ الْجِهَادُ وَالصَّدَقَةُ.

“The best children are daughters behind veils. Whoever has one daughter, God will make her a protection for him against the Fire of Hell. Whoever has two daughters, God will make him enter Heaven with them. If one has three daughters or sisters, the duty of participation in a holy war and payment of charity are removed from him.”²⁵

Ibn Abbas quoted on the authority of God's Prophet :

مَنْ دَخَلَ السُّوقَ فَاشْتَرَى تُحْفَةً فَحَمَلَهَا إِلَى عِيَالِهِ كَانَ كَحَامِلِ صَدَقَةٍ إِلَى قَوْمٍ مَحَاوِيحٍ، وَلْيَبْدُوا بِالْإِنَاثِ قَبْلَ الذَّكَورِ فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ فَرَّحَ ابْنَةً فَكَأَنَّمَا أُعْتِقَ رَقَبَةً مِنْ وُلْدِ اسْمَاعِيلَ.

“One who goes to the bazaar to buy a present for his family is like one who has given some charity to needy people. One must put a higher priority on giving gifts to his daughters over his sons, since making one's daughter happy is like freeing a slave from the children of Ishmael.”²⁶

Raise Children to Raise Your Honor

Imam Sajjad asked us to attend to our children's affairs in such a way as to cause their social growth and increased honor. We should raise them in such a way that they can live with honor and be a source of honor for us. It was mentioned that excessive love for the child might spoil him and make him selfish. He will also be raised in such a way that he cannot rely on himself and become independent. Fathers should foster a sense of self-confidence in their children from their early childhood so that they can be strong in the face of hardships. Imam Sadiq said:

قَالَ لُقْمَانُ: يَا بُنَيَّ إِنْ تَأَدَّبْتَ صَغِيرًا انْتَفَعْتَ بِهِ كَبِيرًا، وَمَنْ عَنِ الْأَدَبِ اهْتَمَّ بِهِ وَمَنْ اهْتَمَّ بِهِ تَكَلَّفَ عِلْمَهُ وَمَنْ تَكَلَّفَ عِلْمَهُ اشْتَدَّ طَلْبُهُ وَمَنْ اشْتَدَّ طَلْبُهُ أَدْرَكَ بِهِ مَنَفَعَتَهُ.

“Luqman said: O my son! You can benefit from politeness later if you learn to be polite when you are young. One who wants to learn to be polite makes an effort to learn. He will make all efforts to acquire educational sciences. Once he learns it, he can benefit from it. O my son! Always oblige yourself to perform your personal duties, and force yourself to withstand the hardships imposed on you by others. Do not be greedy with others if you hope to attain nobility in this world. Do not place any hopes in other people. The Prophets and the Saints have all been able to attain their higher ranks by cutting hopes off the people.”²⁷

We see that Luqman advises his son not to place any hopes in what others have; thus, he helps him develop to be independent. Parents should use these recommendations in raising their children.

- [1.](#) If you fail.
- [2.](#) Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.238.
- [3.](#) Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah.
- [4.](#) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, v.2, p.618.
- [5.](#) Makarim al-Akhlaq, p.220.
- [6.](#) Ibid.
- [7.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Hikmah no.399.
- [8.](#) Koodak (Guftar-i-Falsafi), v.2, p.228, quoted from Gharb al-Asnad, p.45.
- [9.](#) Ibid.
- [10.](#) Ibid. quoted from Sahih Muslim, v.6, p. 173.
- [11.](#) Koodak (Guftar-i-Falsafi), quoted from Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v.5, p. 115.
- [12.](#) Koodak (Guftar-i-Falsafi), v.2, p.228, quoted from Gharb al-Asnad, p.45.
- [13.](#) The son of Abu Sufyan Sakhr b. Harb b. Umayyah.
- [14.](#) Koodak (Guftar-i-Falsafi), quoted from Samarat al-Uraq, p.59.
- [15.](#) Makarim al-Akhlaq, p.219.
- [16.](#) Ibid. p.220.
- [17.](#) Ibid. p.220.
- [18.](#) Ibid. p.223.
- [19.](#) Ibid.
- [20.](#) Tarikh Ya'qubi, v.2, p.320.
- [21.](#) Sharh-i-Ghurar wa Durar, v.4, p. 173.
- [22.](#) Makarim al-Akhlaq, pp.219-220.
- [23.](#) Ibid.
- [24.](#) Ibid.
- [25.](#) Makarim al-Akhlaq, pp.219-220.
- [26.](#) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, v.2, p.615.
- [27.](#) Koodak (Guftar-i-Falsafi), v.2, pp.293-294.

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