

Right n. 44: The Right of the Younger One

حق الصغير

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الصَّغِيرِ فَرَحْمَتُهُ وَتَنْقِيفُهُ وَتَعْلِيمُهُ وَالْعَفْوُ عَنْهُ وَالسِّتْرُ عَلَيْهِ وَالرِّفْقُ بِهِ وَالْمَعُونَةُ لَهُ وَالسِّتْرُ عَلَى جَرَائِرِ حَدَائِثِهِ فَإِنَّهُ سَبَبٌ لِلتَّوْبَةِ وَالْمُدَارَاةُ لَهُ وَتَرْكُ مُمَاحَكَتِهِ، فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَى لِرُشْدِهِ.

And the right of him who is younger than you is that you have compassion on him, train and educate him, pardon him, and cover up his faults, be gentle with him and help him, cover up the guilts of his juvenility because this will make him repent; treat him with patience, and stop quarrelling with him. This will lead him to more sensible conduct.

Imam Sajjad recommends us to treat younger people with kindness, educate them, pardon them and cover up their faults. We should be patient with them and help them with their affairs. Undoubtedly being egocentric is one of the foundations of the development of children's personality. If used properly and directed well, it can lead to their prosperity.

A proper way to respond to this egocentrism is to respect the children and attend to their personality. Any child whose egocentrism is not properly recognized in the family will feel humiliated. He will have a feeling of having failed in life. He will be depressed. Such children are prone to various deviations and faults. That is why Imam Sajjad instructs us to overlook their mistakes.

The Noble Prophet has said the following regarding child-rearing:

أَكْرَمُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ وَأَحْسِنُوا آدَابَكُمْ.

“Respect your children and improve your behavior.”¹

Imam Sajjad has stressed training and educating children as one of the major duties of parents, and rights that children have incumbent upon their parents. The practices and lives of the Immaculate Imams are good examples of this.

Encouraging Children

Imam Hasan gathered his children and his brother's children once and told them:

إِنَّكُمْ صِغَارُ الْيَوْمِ وَيُوشِكُ أَنْ تَكُونُوا كِبَارَ قَوْمٍ آخَرِينَ، فَتَعَلَّمُوا الْعِلْمَ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَحْفَظَهُ فَلْيَكْتُبْهُ
وَلْيَضَعْهُ فِي بَيْتِهِ.

“You are all children today, but will soon be great men in the future, so acquire knowledge. Whoever of you does not have a good memory, should write down what his teachers say and keep the notes at home for later review.”²

We see that Imam Hasan uses the children's egotism to encourage them to study to become great men in the future. He does not resort to punishment or threatening, rather he shows them that their studies today will pave the way for their progress tomorrow. What is done by Imam Hasan is the best known method of educational guidance today. Thus if a family succeeds in encouraging their children to study by raising hopes for their future progress in them, that family can direct them to eagerly pursue knowledge. There is no need to resort to threatening them or using force and punishment.

Proper Way of Child-Rearing

One of the most fundamental conditions for the proper development of our children is freedom. The same holds true for adults. There is no hope for progress in an environment full of oppression. It is the calm atmosphere of freedom that fosters the flourishing of talents. That is why Muslim teachers do not resort to the use of force as much as possible. The Prophet of Islam who was the teacher of humanity was very kind.

Ibn Masoud narrated that once when a man went to see the Prophet , he was afraid to talk. The Prophet said: “Do not be afraid. I am not a king.”³ The Noble Prophet said:

مَنْ كَانَ عِنْدَهُ صَبِيٌّ فَلْيَتَصَابَ لَهُ.

“Whoever has a child should behave like a child with him.”⁴

Imam Ali said:

مَنْ كَانَ عِنْدَهُ وَلَدٌ صَبَا.

“Whoever has a child should play with him.”

The Noble Prophet said:

رَحِمَ اللَّهُ عَبْدًا أَعَانَ وَلَدَهُ عَلَى بِرِّهِ بِالْإِحْسَانِ إِلَيْهِ وَالتَّأَلُّفِ لَهُ وَتَعْلِيمِهِ وَتَأْدِيبِهِ.

“May God’s mercy be upon a servant (of God) who helps his child in righteousness through goodness to him and friendliness towards him, and through educating and training him.”⁵

Respecting Children

Whenever the Noble Prophet of God returned from a journey, and met the children on the way home, he stopped in respect for the children. He then asked the smaller children to come forward. He picked them up and hugged them. He put some of them on his shoulders. He instructed his companions to hug children and let them ride on their shoulders. He said children get really happy this way. The children never forget these moments. Whenever they got together, they proudly talked about how the Prophet of God hugged them, and gave them a ride on his back, or that he ordered his companions to give them rides on their backs.

Overlooking Children’s Mistakes

Imam Sajjad instructs us to pardon the faults of children, and overlook their mistakes. Overlooking and pardoning some of the faults of children is one of the major moral issues that should be used in the education of children. It is sometimes more effective to overlook other people’s mistakes and act as if you know nothing about them. Imam Sadiq said:

صَلَاحُ حَالِ التَّعَايُشِ وَالتَّعَاشُرِ مِثْلُ مِكْيَالِ ثَلَاثَةِ فِطْنَتِهِ وَثُلُثُهُ تَغَافُلٌ.

“Goodness of companionship and living together is a full measure, two-thirds of which is (possessing) understanding and one third of it is overlooking (the shortcomings of others).”⁶

The Prophet of Islam has stressed the importance of overlooking other people’s mistakes as we can read in the following tradition:

الْمُؤْمِنُ نِصْفُهُ تَغَافُلٌ.

“Half of (the nature of) the believer is overlooking mistakes.”⁷

Of course, there are two forms of overlooking. One form is recommendable while the other form is not desirable. The form of overlooking of other people’s mistakes that is recommended by the leaders of Islam is based on the intellect and is meant to make improvements. It is done with good intentions. Teachers can get good results from overlooking, if they do it at the proper time and in the proper place.

As an example, stealing money from the parents is sometimes done by some children all over the world. The instinctive desire to own develops in children sooner or later. Then they start to consider everything their own property. They may take other kids’ toys, or pick some money from their father’s pocket. In these conditions it is best for the father to say: “Some money has been taken from my wallet.” Then the mother should say: “Is there anyone in this house who might do such a bad thing? No, of course not.”

Then the father should apologize and say: “I am sorry. It must have fallen out of my pocket, or maybe I did not get the right change back when I was shopping.” Then the child will think over what he has done, and say to himself how good it is that no one has found out about it. Then he will decide not to do it again, since this will threaten his honor. As stressed by Imam Sajjad , this is one of the situations in which overlooking a child’s mistake is recommendable and will lead to an improvement in his behavior.

¹. Qamus Qu’ran, v.4, p. 129.

². Guftar-i-Falsafi (Koodak), v. 1, p.464, quoted from Bihar al-Anwar, v. 1, p. 110.

³. Guftar-i-Falsafi (Koodak), v. 1, p.479, quoted from Bihar al-Anwar, v. 1, p. 110.

⁴. Ibid. p. 130, quoted from Wasa’il al-Shi’ah, v.5, p. 126.

⁵. Ibid. quoted from Mustadrak al-Wasa’il, v.2, p.262.

⁶. Tuhaf al-‘Uqul, p.264.

⁷. Guftar-i-Falsafi, v. 1, p.405.

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