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Lesson 34: Family Life In Islam (2)

1. Children's Status & Rights

Allah, *subhanahu wa ta`ala*, has made the parents' heart as the source of love for their children. The love for children has been `legislated' by Allah in the very nature of parenthood. It is normal for a parent to love his or her child; it is abnormal for a parent not to love his or her child. This is the natural law as well as the religious law.

Islam has provided some wonderful guidelines for the parents in order to bring up their children —from birth to age 21— in the proper Islamic manner. The Prophet said to Imam 'Ali: "O 'Ali, there are as many rights of children incumbent upon parents as there are rights of parents incumbent upon children."

2. Some Basic Rights

The rights of children upon their parents can be summarized under the following six items:

1. THE RIGHT TO LIVE: No parent has the right to abort the child or to kill the child after birth for any reason whatsoever. For example, the Qur'ān has strongly condemned those who kill their children for fear of poverty. Allah says: *"Do not kill your children because of* (*fear of*) *poverty—We will provide for you and them."* (6:152) The Prophet said, "Whoever refrains from marriage because of fear of poverty, he has indeed thought badly of God."

2. THE RIGHT TO BELONG TO A FAMILY: No parent can disown his or her child, or deprive the child from the family name.

3. THE RIGHT TO HAVE A GOOD NAME: Imam 'Ali says: "The first beneficence of a parent towards his child is to give him a good name; therefore, you should name your child with a good name." A child hears his name day and night; and it is reasonable to believe that the meaning of that name subconsciously strengthens those characteristics which are implied in that name. What is emphasized here is the fact that a name has a psychological effect on the person, provided it is not counter-manded

by rearing or society.

A bad name has one more tangible evil effect. Whenever that name is announced, the person will feel embarrassment and the name will become a source of constant irritation, affecting his outlook on society. Hence the emphasis in *ah□dith* on giving good names to children.

The Prophet used to emphasize this aspect of life so much that Imam as-Sadiq said, "The Prophet used to change the bad names of people and places."

4. THE RIGHT OF MAINTENANCE: It is a child's right to be provided by the parents with the necessities of life: food, dress, shelter, furniture, and whatever a person normally needs to live a respectable life.

5. THE RIGHT TO HAVE BASIC EDUCATION: It is the right of a child to receive basic secular as well as religious education.

6. THE RIGHT TO BE BROUGHT UP ACCORDING TO ISLAM: It is the right of the child to be brought up in a home environment which is Islamic.

3. Three Stages of Life

Islam has divided the upbringing of a child into three stages from birth to age 21. The division is based on the following hadith of the Prophet (s.a.w.): "The child is the master for seven years; and a slave for seven years and a vizier for seven years; so if he grows into a good character within 21 years, well and good; otherwise leave him alone because you have discharged your responsibility before Allah."

The same hadith has been explained by Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a.s.): "Let your child play upto seven years; and keep him with you (for education and training) for another seven years; then if he succeeds (well and good); otherwise, there is no good in him."

The First Stage: from birth to age seven

As the first stage is a care-free period, the child is to be considered as "master" of the parents. The Prophet said, "The child is the master for seven years." This is the age of being a child and playing; he or she is not yet fully ready for education through formal instruction.

What has been said above, however, does not mean that a child cannot grasp or understand anything; not at all. The child is constantly influenced by the atmosphere in which he lives; he/she learns by observation and imitation; therefore, it is absolutely necessary for the parents to provide good examples by their own behaviour. The Prophet said, "Respect your children and teach them good behaviour, Allah will forgive (your sins)."

Although the child is not ready for formal instructions, our Imams have emphasized that religious issues —very basic and simple— should be introduced to them gradually. "Graduality" is the most important

point to remember at this stage of life. The following hadith narrated by `Abdullah ibn Fazl from the fifth or sixth Imam is very significant to understand what is meant by gradually:

"When the child reaches 3 years of age, teach him seven times to recite *la ilaha il-lal l□h.*
Then leave him at that till he is 3 years, 7 months and 20 days old; then train him to say *Muhammadun rasu-lul l□h.*
Then leave him at that till he completes 4 years, then teach him seven times to say *sal-lal l□hu `ala Muhammadin wa □li Muhammad*.
Then leave him at that till he reaches the age of 5 years; then see if he can distinguish between the right and the left hand. When he knows the difference, then make him face *qiblah* and tell him to do *sajdah*. This is to continue till he is 6 years of age. Then he should be told to pray and taught *ruku`* and *sajdah*. When he completes 7 years, then he should be asked to wash his face and hands, and then told to pray. This will continue till he reaches the age of 9 years, when he should be taught proper ritual ablution for prayer and proper sal□t.
When he learns proper wudu and sal□t, Allah forgives the sins of his parents."

The Second Stage: from age eight to fourteen.

The Prophet said, "The child is...a slave for [the next] seven years." Since this is the age when the child's mind can grasp logical reasoning and is developed for formal education—it is very important that the child not only be educated but, at the same time, he or she should be raised with proper Islamic ethics. By saying that the child is a "slave" from eight to fourteen, the Prophet wants to emphasize that at this age the parents should be strict in disciplining their children. A child is a "slave" in the sense that he has to follow the instructions of parents and teachers.

In the sayings of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the Imams of Ahlu 'l-byat (a.s.), three things have been emphasized for the male children in the second stage of upbringing: 1. literacy for secular knowledge; 2. religious knowledge and 3. physical education and martial arts. For example, the Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "It is the right of the male child on his father to...teach him the Book of Allah...and riding and swimming." Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a.s.) said, "It is the duty of the father to teach his son writing."

Religious education is very crucial at this stage so that the child's religious beliefs are based on sound reasoning and firm foundation. Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a.s.) said, "Make haste in teaching your youngsters hadith before they are approached by murji`ite (a misguided sect)."

Literacy, and seeking of secular and religious knowledge has been equally emphasized for the girls in our ahadith. However, instead of physical education, the ahadith talk about those specific subjects which would help the girls in becoming good wives and educated mothers. The destiny of the future generations of the ummah, after all, depends on the mothers who are learned, informed, and aware of their role in establishing a society which is always conscious of Allah's presence.

The Third Stage: from age fifteen to twenty-one.

The Prophet described this stage of upbringing as follows: “The child...is an adviser for [the next] seven years.” At the age of fourteen, fifteen and up, a Muslim child is expected to have become a responsible teenager. Therefore, the Prophet says that the parents should now treat him or her more like a ‘friend’ than a ‘slave’.

At this stage, the parents should guide and help their teenage child in make correct decisions for themselves. In mid- and late-teens, the child has to start the specific training or education for the career that he intends to pursue so that he may soon stand on his own feet. It is also the time when the child is nearing the age of marriage.

Islam has strongly emphasized that the parents should get their daughters married at an early age when they have acquired mental maturity—their higher education can continue even after marriage but marriage should not be postponed for the sake of anything else. The condition of mental maturity cannot be measured by age or time. The same emphasis goes for male children.

At the age of twentyone, the parents’ responsibility towards their children comes to an end. If anyone brings up his children based on Islamic values, that child surely will be the apple of the parents' eyes and the delight of their hearts; and it is this child who, in his turn, may be hoped to fulfil his obligations towards his parents.

The Prophet said, “A virtuous child is a flower from the flowers of Paradise.” He also said, “Among the good fortunes of a man is the virtuous child.”

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This lesson is based on `Allamah Sayyid Sa’eed Akhtar Rizvi's
The Family Life of Isam (Revised Edition, 1980)
with additions and modifications made for this course.

Question Paper on Lesson 34

Question 1: [10 points]
True or False:
(a) The Prophet said, “The child is the master for [the first] seven years.”

(b) A bad name has no tangible effect on the child.

(c) Salat should be taught all at once when a child becomes nine years old.

(d) During the first seven years, a child learns through observation and imitation of the people around him.

(e) Literacy and basic education are necessary for both the boys and the girls.

Question 2: [20 points]
List the six basic rights of children upon their parents.

Question 3: [20 points]
Briefly describe the three stages of upbringing as outlined in the hadith of the Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.).

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