

Raising a Muslim Child – Part 1

In all the years that I have spoken to parents all over the world, I have often asked them one question: ‘Please think of your most powerful role model. For how many of you is it a parent?’

I have never had more than five percent of the population put up their hands. That means that for ninety-five percent of the people, their parents – the two people who invested the most in their upbringing – are not their role models; a real tragedy, though a self-inflicted one. I believe that parenting is a serious job which must be undertaken consciously; clearly understanding what it entails. Children have a right to have good parents who can be role models for them and who can not only teach them the tools to succeed in this life, but also to take from the treasures of Allahﷻ and give to others and thereby succeed in the life to come.

Please remember that whether you like it or not, you are a role model for your children. Your choice is to decide what kind of role model you want to be – one that they can look up to or one that they have to look down upon. Children listen with their eyes. They don’t care what you say until they see what you do. Anyone who has children has no such thing as a private life. Whatever you do is under the lights, will be noticed, learnt, and emulated. If there is any gap between the talk and the walk your credibility with your children will fall through it. Allahﷻ sent you to guide your children and enormity of this responsibility is the reason for the honorable status that Islam gives to parents. Parents who behave dishonorably before their children are the worst of humanity – abysmal, abominable, and disgusting.

Today, young Muslim parents are anxious to ensure that their children are brought up as practicing Muslims and are a credit to themselves and their parents. All power to them. I ask Allahﷻ to help them. But they must be aware that it is hard work to create an investment that will yield great returns long after you are gone. The alternative is to leave behind a legacy of horror which will yield its own result. May Allahﷻ save us from that. What kind of investment our children will be is up to us.

Islam recognizes the nuclear family as the basic building block of society and so Allahﷻ mentioned parents over a dozen times in the Qur’an and honored them and enjoined upon children that they must respect and obey them and treat them with kindness when they are old. Allahﷻ mentioned the relationship of the spouses and called it one of His Ayaat and emphasized its qualities of faithfulness, tranquility, love and mercy. He said:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

Room 30:21. *And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find tranquility in them, and He has put between you love and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for people who reflect.*

About duty to parents and how children should relate to them, Allahﷻ said:

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ

Luqman 31: 14. *And We have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship, upon weakness and hardship, and his weaning is in two years. Give thanks to Me and to your parents, unto Me is the final destination.*

However all this is based on the responsibility that Heﷻ sent parents with. The honor is a result of fulfilling that responsibility. If parents don't fulfill that responsibility and instead misguide children and encourage them to disobey Allahﷻ and His Messengerﷺ then Allahﷻ set the limits of obedience.

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حُسْنًا وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

Ankabut 29: 8. *And We have enjoined on man to be good and dutiful to his parents, but if they strive to make you join with Me (in worship) anything (as a partner) of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Unto Me is your return, and I shall tell you what you used to do.*

A big misconception that Muslim parents have is that their responsibility is like that of any other parent; feed them, clothe them, shelter them, send them to a good (usually meaning expensive) school and safeguard their future by investing for them if they have the funds to do so – and that's it. Well, it isn't.

Given that Allahﷻ sent Muslims with a special responsibility it can and must be argued that merely taking care of the physical and to an extent, emotional needs of the child is not sufficient for a child which has come with his destiny written to be a leader. As was the practice of the kings of old, princes and princesses were taught and raised differently from ordinary people. They were raised to prepare them for the responsibility that their birth loaded them with. The son or daughter of a king has his/her career choice pre-determined. They have no choice in the matter and so must prepare for it. We have myriad examples of what happened to those who prepared and those who ignored the responsibility and simply spent their lives

in the pursuit of pleasure. They lost everything including their privileged positions and in many cases, their lives.

I argue that the Muslim child is in the same position – not as a future king or queen but as a leader, leading not to worldly success alone but to success in both worlds. And so he/she must be prepared and equipped to fulfill that trust. He/she must be treated differently, taught differently, enabled differently and inspired differently. It is not for the young of the Golden Eagle to be taught to scratch in the dirt for worms. He must be taught to fly in the eye of the storm and take his prey on the wing. Allama Iqbal said:

Aik Naujawan Ke Naam
TO A YOUNG MAN

ترے صوفے ہیں افرنگی، ترے قالین ہیں ایرانی
لہو مجھ کو رلاتی ہے جوانوں کی تن آسانی

Tere Sofe Hain Afarangi, Tere Qaleen Hain Irani
Lahoo Mujh Ko Rulati Hai Jawanon Ki Tan Asani

Your sofas are from Europe, your carpets from Iran;
The luxury ease-seeking of youth makes me cry tears of blood

امارت کیا، شکوہ خسروی بھی ہو تو کیا حاصل
نہ زور حیدری تجھ میں، نہ استغنائے سلمانی

Amarat Kya, Shikoh-e-Khusrawi Bhi Ho To Kya Hasil
Na Zor-e-Haidari Tujh Mein, Na Istaghna-e-Salmani

Leave alone leadership, what use is it even if you get the pomp of Khusrow,
You have neither the power of Haidar (Ali) nor the contentment of Salman (Al Farsi).

نہ ڈھونڈ اس چیز کو تہذیب حاضر کی تجلی میں
کہ پایا میں نے استغنا میں معراج مسلمانی

Na Dhoond Iss Cheez Ko Tezeeb-e-Hazir Ki Tajali Mein
Ke Paya Main Ne Istaghna Mein Meeraj-e-Musalmani

Don't seek this in the glitter of modern society,
For in contentment I have found the peak (Meraj) of being Muslim.

عقابی روح جب بیدار ہوتی ہے جوانوں میں
نظر آتی ہے اس کو اپنی منزل آسمانوں میں

Oqabi Rooh Jab Baidar Hoti Hai Jawanon Mein
Nazar Ati Hai Iss Ko Apni Manzil Asmanon Mein

(Only) when an eagle's spirit awakens in youthful hearts,
Does it see its destination in the heavens .

نہ ہو نومید، نومیدی زوال علم و عرفاں ہے
امید مرد مومن ہے خدا کے رازدانوں میں

Na Ho Naumeed, Naumeedi Zawal-e-Ilm-o-Irfan Hai
Umeed-e-Mard-e-Momin Hai Khuda Ke Raazdanon Mein

Despair not, for despair is the decline of knowledge and understanding

The faith of the Believer is in the hearts of those who know Allah ﷻ

نہیں تیرا نشمین قصر سلطانی کے گنبد پر
تو شاہیں ہے، بسیرا کر پہاڑوں کی چٹانوں میں

Nahin Tera Nasheman Qasr-e-Sultani Ke Gunbad Par
Tu Shaheen Hai, Basera Kar Paharon Ki Chatanon Mein

Your home is not on the dome of a royal palace;
You are an eagle make your home on the rocks of mountains.

I am sure all Urdu speakers, especially those who make it a point to agitate for the protection and development of Urdu have children who know these verses and can understand them. If not we need not seek further than within ourselves to answer why it is that almost a century after Allama Iqbal said these words, we are still scratching in the dirt. Development and change happens when we work for it. Not when we shout about its need but actually do nothing to bring it about. Urdu will develop when we learn and teach it to our children. Not when we agitate for the government to support what we don't.

I've met many parents who struggled very hard to overcome difficult circumstances in their childhood and who say to themselves (and to everyone else) with great emotion and tears in their eyes, "I will never allow my children to face the hardship that I had to go through." When I hear this statement I tell them, "Why don't you change your words and say instead, 'I will never allow my children to build resilience, character and strength. I will never allow them to have the power that I had, to succeed.'" This response comes as a shock to them when they were expecting appreciation from me. They had never thought about their view on raising of children in that light. But that is the truth. Over-protection and molly coddling is the worst thing that parents can do to their children. All we need to do is to look around us and see what our children are suffering from – yes suffering – over feeding by paranoid mothers or starvation. Fat flabby freaks that are fit for nothing can achieve nothing. Decide what you want your child to be and then throw out all the garbage in your fridge and chuck him out into the playing field. If he returns with his shirt clean and his knees unscraped, send him out again until he learns the real meaning of football. Life is a contact sport. Greenhouse trees can't survive in the real world. We need gnarled oaks with deep roots that can withstand the vagaries of climate, waterless summers and the mauling of gales in freezing winter, yet stand firm, giving shade to the traveler and bearing witness to life.

That takes nurturing that is a lot more than merely feeding Cerelac and bananas. It takes wisdom, the willingness to allow them to fall – bandage the wound but ensure that the lesson is learnt. Parenting requires the parents to develop themselves to a level where they become the inspiration in the lives of their children. It requires us to face the fact that ignorant parents can only produce ignorant children. Parents who have no books in the house will not have children addicted to reading. Parents whose conversation centers around the lives of other people can't have children who speak about great ideas and dream of changing the world. Parents whose major life decisions are which dress to wear or which handbag to carry can't guide children who are struggling with existential questions relating to their purpose in life. Parents need to wake up and face the fact that their problems related to raising children are really a reflection of how little they have invested in themselves. Paupers can hardly be expected to help others. The time to change is now and it is never too late.

Muslim families today spend far too little time in inculcating the value of contribution; of each generation creating its own legacy and not being content to ride on the back of the earlier generation. They give their children the same education that is given to the children of ordinary people who are not Muslim. They don't prepare their children for the distinctly different responsibility that they will have to shoulder. This is not arrogance; it is merely recognizing the fact that Muslim children are going to inherit a mission that is completely

different from anyone else. They have been sent to give – not to take. So they must build a treasure house of faith, wisdom, compassion, courage and talents because you can only give what you have. It is essential for them to understand the distinctly different responsibility that comes with such a mission for which they will be answerable to Allahﷻ.

Parents often equate expense with quality. They give their children the most expensive education which often insulates them from the realities of life and they never learn how to fight the real battles. Most such schools are very keen for the child to ‘feel good’ and bend over backward to make the child ‘happy’. Parents love it. Children obviously love it even more. But in the process children learn nothing about life. Parents set no boundaries, the school teaches no boundaries and children grow up with the feeling that as long as they are happy they can do whatever they like. Nothing is more destructive for the child than this attitude.

Parents give them expensive toys mostly as guilt placebos to compensate for the fact that their own social lives don’t allow them to spend real time with their child and which teach the children to define human value in terms of material worth (the ‘best’ kids are those who have the best toys). The TV and today gadgets (iPads especially) are given as substitutes for mothering and fathering and parents proudly tell you how their little two-year old can do wonders with his iPad. They don’t ask what the maker of iPad, Steve Jobs said about his product and children: <http://www.breitbart.com/california/2014/09/17/steve-jobs-banned-his-children-from-using-an-ipad/>

I quote from this article: *Jobs seems to have set the bar in Silicon Valley for entrepreneurs encouraging their kids to be creative by limiting access to the consumer tech products they hock to the public. In an article in the Sunday New York Times article titled “[Steve Jobs Was a Low-Tech Parent](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/fashion/steve-jobs-apple-was-a-low-tech-parent.html)” (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/fashion/steve-jobs-apple-was-a-low-tech-parent.html>) reporter Nick Bilton found: A growing trend among the California Silicon Valley tech set to limit children’s technology use. Many of the people behind the social media platforms, gadgets and games that are consuming our kids’ time and minds aren’t actually allowing their own children to waste an entire Saturday afternoon playing Minecraft on the iPad.*

Chris Anderson, former editor of Wired Magazine, Chief Executive of 3D Robotics, and father of five, emphasized that he and other tech colleagues are limiting technology in the home: My kids accuse me and my wife of being fascists and overly concerned about tech, and they say that none of their friends have the same rules. That’s because we have seen the dangers of technology firsthand. I’ve seen it in myself; I don’t want to see that happen to my kids.

A 2011 New York Times [story](#) reported that engineers and execs from Apple, eBay, Google, Hewlett-Packard, and Yahoo are sending their kids to Waldorf elementary school in Los Altos, California, where

kids are discouraged from watching television or logging on at home, and there are no computers or other electronic “devices.”

The Times found that Alan Eagle, who works in executive communications at Google and has a degree in computer science from Dartmouth, has a fifth grader at Waldorf who “doesn’t know how to use Google.”

The goal of a tech free childhood is to make sure that hands-on creativity, expressive movement, and person-to-person interaction in kids is not stifled by escape into the netherworld of four inch screens. Waldorf believes that their students are “gaining math, patterning, and problem-solving skills by knitting socks.” They also suggest that learning fractions is best accomplished by learning about halves and quarters by cutting up food.

Just ask yourself, ‘What do these very smart people who build the stuff and have become billionaires on that basis, know about it that I don’t? And if it is indeed as good as I have been telling myself, then why don’t they allow their children to touch it until they are teenagers? So is your little two-year old with his iPad smart or are you dumb?

So what must you do now? Take away the screens and give them books. Don’t worry if they scream and moan for a while. They will learn the joy of reading and then doors will open for them without the harm of the screens.