

Raising a Muslim Child

Preparing them for their destiny

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 عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنْ 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 Messenger ﷺ 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 Allah ﷻ 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 افرنکی، 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 استغنائے 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 راز دانوں 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 نشیمن 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>) 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.

Let me ask you a question: How many kids do you have? So do you have kids or children? Because goats have kids not people. People have children. So stop calling them kids and stop treating them like kids. They are children, not little goats. This is not a game of semantics. It illustrates the attitude that most parents have towards their children. They think that their duty as parents is restricted to feeding, clothing and keeping their children warm. That is what you do with little goats. Not with little humans. Little humans need a whole lot more in terms of inspiration, understanding ethics and values, emotional comfort, mental challenge and spiritual fulfillment.

We have reached a state today where it is only momentary pleasure that seems important to us. Not even physical well-being. But even if it was only physical well-being we need to remember that we are not only bodies. Neither are our children. We also have Quloob (mind+heart) and Arwaah (souls) which also need food, care and exercise otherwise like the body they get sick atrophy, decay and die, often before the body dies. But like prolonged near starvation deadens hunger pangs to the extent that the body no longer gives out danger signals of its impending demise, our Quloob and Arwaah have reached a state where we are no longer aware that we even have them. What a terrible tragedy this is! And it is these soulless and mindless parents which are inflicted on their poor unsuspecting and helpless children. The result is painfully visible all around us. Islam focuses on real overall development – body, mind and soul – something that we need desperately in order to succeed.

Let me give you a glimpse of what is possible which Allahﷻ told us about:

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ السَّعْيَ قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ إِنِّي أَرَى فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ فَانْظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَى قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ
افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ

فَلَمَّا أَسْلَمَا وَتَلَّهُ لِلْجَبِينِ

وَنَادَيْنَاهُ أَنْ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ

قَدْ صَدَّقْتَ الرُّؤْيَا إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Saafaat 37: 102. And, when he (his son) was old enough to walk with him, he said: "O my son! I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you (offering you in sacrifice to Allah), so look what you see?" He said: "O my father! Do that which you are commanded, Insha' Allah (if Allah wills), you shall find me of As-Sabirin (the patient ones)." **103.** Then, when they had both submitted themselves (to the Will of Allah), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (or on the side); **104.** And We called out to him: "O Ibrahim! **105.** You have fulfilled the dream (vision)!" Verily! Thus do We reward the Muhsinun

Ask yourself, what kind of upbringing it was that made it possible for Ibrahim عليه السلام to have the kind of conversation that he had with his little son Ismail عليه السلام. And even more importantly what was it that produced the answer from a child that was powerful enough for Allah ﷻ to quote it in His Book? Allah ﷻ gave us the example for us to follow and mould such children who have the potential to become beacons of guidance for others. But that won't happen unless they have the right foundation. That is your challenge and it takes time, energy and tears in the night. NOT MONEY.

Most wealthy parents try their best to insulate children from poverty, hardship, hunger and lack of resources little realizing that they are 'protecting' them from being exposed to the power of drive, ambition, courage and focus to achieve big, ambitious, scary goals. They build walls between their children and the people who they must deal with when they enter the real world; people who will one day work

with them and share their lives and decide their fate. People who need to be inspired, led, cared for, and supported. And therefore, people who must be understood – not simply in order to be charitable, but because the success of their mission and life depends on the development of these people; the great multitude. The fond parents forget or ignore the fact that one day the time will come for their soft little molly coddled pussy cat to enter the jungle of the real world without any of the tools it needs to survive, much less to lead others.

It is not sufficient to simply feed, clothe, and shelter the child. You do that for a pet cat. It's not enough for a child. A child must be raised, taught his or her place in society, given the tools to succeed, and made aware of its responsibility as a human being. Muslim children, even more, need a very different education, very different life experiences, and very different criteria to measure themselves, all of which have to be inculcated from the earliest childhood. Being rich or poor is not about how much you have. It is about how you think. The best and most powerful asset that Muslim parents can give to their children is to teach them these tools.

Allah ﷻ said about the role of the Muslim:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

A'al Imraan 3: 110. You [Muslims] are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind; you enjoin Al-Ma'ruf (all that Islam has ordained) and forbid Al-Munkar (all that Islam has forbidden), and you believe in Allah.

Allah ﷻ defined the role of the Muslim not in terms of what he has but what he does. And even in that, He didn't define it in terms of what he does for himself but what he does for others. A Muslim is defined by his Rabb in terms of his actions as they impact on society. Allah ﷻ didn't say – you worship Allah ﷻ, constantly, stay away from Haraam, memorize Qur'an, fast frequently, make Hajj and Umrah. He said, you were sent to benefit all mankind. You enjoin, encourage, support, promote and

facilitate all that is right and good and you prevent, oppose, discourage, abandon and prohibit all that is bad and wrong. Muslims therefore must learn to redefine their lives in terms of their impact on society in the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah – because the only definition of what is right or wrong that is acceptable to Allah ﷻ is His own definition – all that He ordained and informed us through His Messenger ﷺ. Naturally if the Muslim is to fulfill his destiny and find acceptance with Allah ﷻ then he/she must understand what this destiny is, be inspired by it, learn how to accomplish it, consciously dedicate his life to it and find fulfillment in the journey. To succeed this has to start very early, literally even before the child is born and definitely as soon thereafter as the parents realize their responsibility. The earlier you start, the better your chance of success. Tragic it is for parents who see the result of their lack of consciousness, laziness and wrong focus, come home to roost and know that it was the work of their own hands. A child is a clean slate. You write whatever you want to on it. That becomes your own future.

Conscious parents make dua for good children who are Saliheen – obedient to Allah ﷻ and Rasoolullah ﷺ and a credit to their parents. Mothers recite Qur'an constantly during their pregnancy. Many Salaf have reported knowing a considerable part of the Qur'an in their earliest childhood because of their mother's recitation. We don't know how exactly this works medically speaking but that is like most things, medically speaking. So write it off to a good virus or whatever but believe me, it exists. After all it is well known that the mother's mood affects the development of the foetus – so why not the mother's Taqwa. I am not talking about physical but spiritual development. So while you concentrate on what to eat and what not to eat during pregnancy also concentrate on reading Qur'an and making dua. Spend less time on choosing blue or pink clothes – one of the many ways in which Western values have invaded our society. Benign, you may say. But remember that it is not your child's welfare that is at the heart of those who propagate these values but purely commercial profit. How soon can they get you to

start spending money? Very soon, it turns out. Then there are the Baby Showers. And in case you think I am talking about bathroom fittings – it is a whole new way to spend some more money in ways that are either prohibited or value neutral. Not a way to gain Hasanaath. So there are Baby Shower party themes, games, favors, what food to serve, who to invite and whatnot. And of course I have yet to hear of a Baby Shower that was a Tahajjud Salah with dua for the mother and baby.

Muslims being little monkeys, aping everyone else are very quick to fall in line and say, ‘Ah! No need to become so rigid. What is the harm in a little fun?’ Well, as they say, ‘It’s your baby!’

As I said, when you have a special gift and are serious about leveraging it, you have to prepare and work to develop that gift. What is a more valuable gift than Islam? If only we realized its benefit. A good way to understand this is to see how child prodigies are brought up. They are not given the same education as everyone else. The entire focus of their education, both formal and informal, is based on the eventual role that they must play. Only then can the true glory of the gift that they have been bestowed with, shine forth.

Take for example the tennis legend Andre Agassi. Agassi’s father wanted him to be the top tennis player in the world and focused his training towards this goal since he was a baby. To begin with, he spent considerable resources of a modest income in building a tennis court in their home. He then built a ball throwing machine that could throw tennis balls at one-hundred-and-ten *miles* per hour. This was in the 1970’s – ball machines that could throw at such speed weren’t readily available in the market. But he wanted the best for his child so he built it himself with a modified engine.

He started training Agassi with a tennis racket as soon as he was strong enough to hold one in his hands. By the age of seven, Agassi was hitting twenty-five-hundred balls across the net every day, coming to him at a speed of a hundred-and-ten miles

per hour. If you do the math, that comes out close to a million hits a year. To this day, he is regarded as the best service returner in the history of the game. Returning balls coming at hundred-and-ten miles per hour, twenty-five-hundred times a day as a seven-year-old had something to do with that. That is not the bottom line of this story for me. The bottom line is the thought – how many Andre Agassies are out there, who were born with the talent but without a father like the one and only Andre Agassi? How many Imam Bukharis were born with a prodigious memory and an analytical mind but without a mother like Imam Bukhari had? So they remember film songs and not the Qur'an.

How many Imam Malik bin Anas' were born with his special talents and wisdom but without a mother who said to him when she sent him to learn from Rabi'a'tur Raayi, 'Take from the Akhlaaq and Adab of Rabi'a before you take from his knowledge.'

Allama Iqbal's father had a rule that his son would not do anything else until he had finished his Qur'an reading assignment for the day. Allama Iqbal says that one day while he was reading; his father passed by and said, 'That Kalaam will not affect you until it is sent down on your heart.' How many of us have thought about this – that our job is to persuade our Rabb to send the Qur'an down on our hearts. The sign of that, is what it does in our lives. Those who have received the Qur'an in their hearts, live their lives according to it. They don't sell it for a living. They don't take money to teach it. They don't make a business out of the Qur'an. They don't disobey it or try to justify their own wrongdoing by twisting and manipulating the Qur'an. Self-testing is meant for self-correction. Please apply.

Children born to Muslim parents have been gifted with resources – with the tools to connect to Allahﷻ. But like all tools, they must be taught how to use them. But those who are supposed to teach them must know what the tool is and how to teach it. So once again we are back to the need for parents to develop themselves. Parenting

starts with good parents who are pious, knowledgeable, connected to Allah ﷻ, obedient followers of the Sunnah, have wisdom and beautiful Akhlaaq. Please notice that I didn't mention money even once. That's because it is not necessary. Even if you have it but none of the essential qualities I mentioned earlier, your money can't buy any of them. The price of these qualities has to be paid in sleep, sweat and time. Time that must come out of the useless and often harmful activities that we normally engage in. Rasoolullah ﷺ didn't ever run a crèche or Maktab. He moulded parents – adults. Who in turn worked on their children. Adults who were conscious enough about their responsibility and value in investing in themselves and their children that they made this Tarbiyya with Rasoolullah ﷺ the prime purpose of their lives and made everything else subservient to it. Ask yourselves what your priorities are. For they will determine your destiny.

Muslim children are not ordinary children; to treat them as if they were is to deny them the opportunity to make a mark in the world that others will have to try far harder to do. They must be brought up always with the final aim of leading the world in mind. They must be carefully watched, nurtured, and mentored from the earliest age. They must be given tasks of graduated difficulty so that they learn to win on their own. They must be allowed to face their fears and conquer them. They must not be protected. They must be inspired and given an inspirational environment which keeps them motivated. They must be taught to dream big dreams and then to have the discipline and structure to make them come true. They must be taught resilience to deal with failure which we all have to face, with equanimity and to get up and keep running because the result of the race is decided only at the end. But what if they have parents who themselves have no clue about these tools?

We need to raise children to be confident of themselves, strive to be the best that they can be, have the compassion and courage to help others, and face success and

failure with equal equanimity. That is our mission statement for the SBA incidentally. The key however is not only to write the mission statement but to have the ability and dedication to make it happen. Mission statements can be copied and touted to raise cash. The results however can't be faked. They will happen only if you know how to make them happen. Once again, it comes down to developing yourself.

Muslim children must learn that to be poor and to be honorable are not mutually exclusive; just as to be rich and honorable are not mutually inclusive. They must learn that virtue is a state of mind; a stance, a decision, a position that one takes, not because someone is watching, but because of one's own sense of identity. I do, because of who I am. And I become because I do. They must learn that our actions define us. They must learn that people will remember them on the basis of both what they owned and what they contributed. But they will honor them only for what they contributed. We are remembered not for what we had, but for what we gave. Only when they are taught to focus on contribution from their earliest childhood will they be able to fight the force of consumerism that is focused on consumption; blind, self-centered consumption that will consume us all if it is allowed to proliferate unchallenged. Muslim families must bring up children who will challenge and not mindlessly conform to these norms and create a society that is focused on contribution instead of consumption, so that in the end we leave behind a place that is better for our passing. A sense of entitlement is the worst impediment to development and growth that you can possibly give your child.

"I wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites, and go to the ends of the earth in search of their satisfaction. If modern civilization stands for all this, and I have understood it to do so, I call it satanic." Mahatma Gandhi.

I ask you, what did he understand that modern Muslim parents don't?

It is when parents bring up self-centered children focused on consumption, that when the time comes, they think nothing of breaking up the family in their fight to get the most for themselves. When children are focused on what they can contribute, they will work to take care of their family and society at large and to ensure that their influence and service is enjoyed by more and more people worldwide. In the process it is inevitable that the individual himself grows and becomes richer and more powerful because wealth and power are the result of intelligent effort; not its objective. In my practice in business consulting specializing in advising family businesses I can distinctly recall that every case of bitter internecine quarrelling resulting in lawsuits between parents and children and between siblings can be traced to toddler behavior in the nursery. Parents giving in to tantrums, overprotecting children, no focus on values, manners, ethics – even in families that teach Salah and Qur'an – are all causes of major grief later in life.

All of this centers around the theme of you – parents – developing yourself to bring up worthy children. And so my question to you is, 'What is it that you are doing towards that end? What are you learning? How have you changed your lifestyle? What are you investing in yourself that is for the benefit of your children? And if you can't answer these questions, then you must ask how you are going to succeed as parents? Nothing happens by itself. Least of all good parenting. Parenting is a contact sport. It can't be outsourced. Teachers can supplement and support parenting. But parenting is called parenting because it is about parents. Parents think that parenting is about children. It isn't. It is about parents for the simple reason that the child is the outcome of the success or failure of parenting. That is the reason Allah ~~ج~~ gave parents their status. It is the result of fulfilling the responsibility. It doesn't happen by accident or chance. It happens only by conscious effort.

I believe that it is essential for Muslims to ensure that their children are taught five foundational and fundamental essentials:

1. Identity: Who am I? (Being Standard Bearers of Islam)
2. Connection with Allah ﷻ: Tawheed & Uboodiya
3. Connection with Rasoolullah ﷺ: Sunnah & Being a member of the Ummah
4. Take from Allah ﷻ and give to the world: Salah, Dua, Charity, Da'awa
5. Tools to deal with the world:
 - a. Reading & Assimilation,
 - b. Critical thinking & Analysis,
 - c. Powerful communication (spoken & written),
 - d. Adaab-ul-Ikhtilaaf – Conflict resolution,
 - e. Hard work & Delivery – Mental toughness,
 - f. Creativity to generate alternate solutions – No excuses,
 - g. Teamwork (followership)

Who They Are: Being a Standard Bearer of Islam

Allah ﷻ said:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

Aal Imraan 3:110. You [Muslims] are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind; you enjoin Al-Ma'rûf (good) and forbid Al-Munkar (evil), and you believe in Allâh.

The strongest shield against evil influences of society is high confidence and a strong sense of and pride in personal identity that is based on a noble history. One must differentiate between confidence and arrogance; between pride in one's identity and looking down on others. One is right and the other Haraam. There's nothing romantic about being apologetic. Decide what you are and either take pride in it or become something else. But don't live your life apologizing to the world about your

personal identity. The world respects those who have confidence no matter how freaked out they may appear. So stop apologizing for being Muslim.

"I fear the day where disbelievers are proud of their falsehood and Muslims are shy of their faith." ~ Umar ibn al-Khattab (رضي الله عنه)

What can be nobler than the foundation of being Muslim and an Ummati of Rasoolullah ﷺ - not a distinction of race, tribe or nationality but of faith and a connection with Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ? It is when this is deeply ingrained in the child that when he or she encounters a situation where there is temptation and Shaytaan is on one side and you are not standing on the other, this sense of 'Who am I?' comes to the rescue and the child chooses the right thing because, 'Well, we don't do that.' We don't do drugs not only because it is illegal and stupid but because we are Muslim and Muslims don't do drugs. Can't let the side down. I am not alone. I stand for my side.

Muslim children therefore must be brought up with the final aim in mind of leading the world into Jannah. They must be carefully watched, nurtured, and mentored from the earliest age. This is the meaning of Tarbiyya. They must be given tasks of increasing difficulty so that they learn to win on their own. They must be allowed to face their fears and to conquer them. They must be supported but not protected. They must be advised but not directed. They must be allowed to take their own decisions but not without the benefit of the frame of reference of the values of Tawheed, Sunnah, truth, honor, justice, responsibility, accountability, nurturing, and trusteeship. They must be allowed to feel, to cry in the night for the hardships that others undergo, to build friendships and relationships that span the boundaries of color, race, religion, nationality and much more difficult, social order and prejudice.

Akhlaaq: The Key Differentiator

It is the connection with Allah ﷻ that is the primary responsibility of the parent to build and constantly strengthen and which is the biggest and best protection against all the evil that seems to surround us, ever more closely.

Children must be taught Akhlaaq (manners) that will differentiate them from the rest and make them stand out as Standard Bearers of Islam. Apart from all things to do with social graces and politeness, a Muslim child must be taught those things that Allah ﷻ considered important enough to mention in the Qur'an.

Allah ﷻ said:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّن نِّسَاءٍ
عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْإِسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ
بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَن لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبِ
بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ
رَّحِيمٌ

Al Hujuraat 49:10. The believers are nothing else than brothers (in Islâm). So make reconciliation between your brothers, and fear Allâh, that you may receive mercy. 11. O you who believe! Let not a group scoff at another group, it may be that the latter are better than the former; nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former, nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames. How bad is it, to insult one's brother after having Faith [cursing, using bad language]. And whosoever does not repent, then such are indeed Zalimun (wrong-doers). 12. O you who believe! Avoid suspicion, indeed some suspicions are sins. And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would

one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting). And fear Allâh. Verily, Allâh is the One Who accepts repentance, Most Merciful.

Children must be taught how to speak to elders and teachers and to their own siblings. They must learn that respect is due to age, learning, and character; not due to possessions and money. They must learn that their behavior will define them and that when they show respect for others they are merely demonstrating their own upbringing and bringing honor to themselves and those who raised them.

When they are disrespectful the contrary is equally true. Being disrespectful is not insulting to the other person; it merely demonstrates the dishonorable nature of the doer.

It is strange that today it is very common to ask a young person, 'How are you?' – Only to hear the rude answer, 'I'm good!' That's all. No, 'Very well, thank you. And how are you?' No, 'Alhamdulillah'. Just, 'I'm good.' Good or bad is a value judgment for others to make about your behavior. Not for you to self-proclaim. It is common for people to ask for things without saying, 'Please' or to take things without asking permission or to simply walk away after having stamped your foot or kicked your briefcase or sneezed in your face, and not bother to say, 'I'm sorry.' Muslims enter the masjid and start praying in the walkway without a thought about the inconvenience to others. Muslims and their parking antics are the subject of a legitimate PhD thesis on the psychology that drives such behavior. It is the major reason why others object to the building of Masaajid in their neighborhood.

All these and more can be traced to upbringing. Children learn by seeing what their parents do. A teacher once asked a question in a class of pre-primary children, 'What does the red traffic light stand for?' 'STOP!' They all yelled. 'Green?' asked the teacher. 'Go', they all yelled. 'And Orange?' asked the teacher. 'Go fast!' yelled the children. Children listen with their eyes. Muslim children were once known for their

upbringing. Not anymore. This must change. The child is our product, our signature. Ask if you want to be known as the father or mother of a young animal or of a young man or woman who makes you proud to be the father or mother of. It won't happen automatically. Raising children is a full time job. It is a contact sport. You have to skin your knees, bruise your ankles, get your hands dirty and above all, break your heart. Only then does parenting work. Until you are ready to do that, eat popcorn before the TV set.

Children must be taught that meal times are sacred because the home is not a hotel where one can simply order room service. Meals, especially the one meal at which the whole family eats together, must not be missed or interrupted. No screens in the bedroom or dining table. Mealtime is for the family and any family guests. Exams, games, TV shows, football, cricket, or basketball matches are not acceptable excuses for missing the family meal. It is okay to invite friends to a meal at home but not okay to talk to them on the phone while the rest of the family eats. Children must learn that their guests must also follow the rules of the family home.

Naturally, it is the parents who have to set the norm. If the father misses the meal without comment, then so will the child. If the father sits in front of the TV because he wants to see what happened to his favorite team and moves the meal to the living room with eyes glued to the screen, then this will become the norm and he will have no moral authority to insist that the children do something different. If parents sit in their favorite chair and shout out to the servant to get this or that, so will the children. If parents litter, children will too. If parents pay children to wash cars, mow lawns, clean attics or garages, instead of personally doing these things taking the children along with them, then children will learn that as long as they can throw money at some poor person to do their work, they need not care for their own environment. Not only will they not learn to take care of their common spaces, but

they will also learn to treat some jobs with disrespect and to look down on those who do those jobs.

Children must learn that you can never repay a kindness because the one who did it the first time was not doing it as a reaction. These are basic manners which we seem to have forgotten to our own detriment. So wake up!

Each of these behaviors discussed above can be linked to one or more of the evils of our society; one that is stratified according to economic circumstances, not according to knowledge, moral values, or being honorable. A society where people don't care for other people. Where the self is worshipped and indulgence is the supreme goal. Where freedom is defined as the ability to indulge your whims with impunity, even when some of this indulgence may be breaking the laws of God or country. You can see the character of a nation reflected in the things they compete for. Ask what you see Muslims competing for today? Knowledge, compassion, charity, piety and contribution? Or plain crass consumption, ostentation, arrogance, satisfying animal lusts and accumulating expensive garbage?

When Gandhiji died someone took a picture of what he owned. The picture shows his trademark spectacles, a pair of sandals, a watch, an eating bowl and plate and a Khadi dhoti. The world bore witness to the fact that he went to meet the king in his dhoti. Replying to a journalist whether he didn't feel under-dressed to meet the king in his dhoti, Gandhiji's response was - "The King has enough on for both of us" - This was the perfect riposte. By keeping his wits as well as his wit about him, Gandhiji showed the world what is to be taken seriously and what is to be brushed off with a quick line and a supreme demonstration of self-confidence. Not only did the world accept this but Gandhiji is the first non-royal to appear on a British postage stamp. He made it there before Churchill who refused to meet him saying, 'I refuse to meet that naked fakir until he learns to dress properly.' The naked fakir smiled when he

heard that comment because he was looking at a future when he was about to kick Churchill and Churchillian ways out of his country.

Muslim children must learn that Islam is not just a set of rituals of worship but a complete way of life where duties to people are mentioned with duties to Allah ﷻ. They must be taught how worship adds value in this life; how it gives them a competitive advantage to win in this life. They must be taught how connecting to Allah ﷻ gives them an insider's advantage enabling them to infuse Baraka into all that they say and do so that they get maximum result with minimum effort. That is the definition of leverage. It is our inability to interpret Islam and show how it makes sense today that gets our children disconnected from Allah ﷻ. They are disconnected because we are disconnected. After all you can only give what you have. So ask, 'What do I have?' And then make the effort to upgrade yourself. A candle doesn't light up a room by doing anything to the room. It lights up the room by igniting itself. So learn to take from Allah ﷻ and give your children. If you can't even give your children how are you going to give the world? The way to do that is to follow the Sunnah of Rasoolullah ﷺ. Make no mistake. If you don't follow the Sunnah of Rasoolullah ﷺ you will get nothing. Try it for yourself or regret it when you die. It's your call. All these things will make the Muslim child a walking, talking example of the Way of Islam and will differentiate him from the rest and make him a benchmark and a role model for others.

This is the essence of Islam and the example that Rasoolullah ﷺ and his Sahaba left for us, when they used to say to anyone who asked about Islam, 'Become like us.' That was because they were Islam personified. And that is the first duty of the Muslim parent – to mould the child in the Islamic Way by demonstrating. Rasoolullah ﷺ ever taught children. He didn't run a crèche or a Maktab. He taught the parents. He taught adults and they in turn taught their children. Parenting can't be outsourced. It has to be done hands on and for that you have to learn how. Producing children is natural. Parenting is not. Parenting like driving has to be

learned but unlike driving unfortunately you don't need a license to do it. More the pity for we see the results of unlicensed parenting all around us and we suffer from it. But that doesn't mean that you should also do it. So please learn to become good parents because parenting is not about children. Parenting is about parents. Children are its beneficiaries or its victims. Your call once again.

Define Boundaries

The biggest mistake that parents make is not to define boundaries. Parents must parent. Many parents today seem to be too focused on being 'friends' to their children at the expense of parenting. In this endeavor they bend over backward trying to be nice to the children and do whatever the children want them to. Boundaries are therefore never firm and clear. They are always open to negotiation and children push the boundaries until they get what they want from parents who have confused parenting with being 'friendly.' Parents must remember that their children can have many friends but they have only two parents. Parents have been assigned the role of parenting. Every other role is optional. The only assigned role is that of parenting and they need to fulfill that first and foremost.

Children are forever testing boundaries. So these must be clear. For example, children can disagree with parents on issues provided they do so respectfully. They must learn that cheekiness is not cute, it is insulting. That joking and insulting are two different things. That assertiveness is to insist on your rights without violating the rights of others. That aggressiveness is to violate the rights of others; one is commendable, the other is reprehensible. That caring for your environment (read: home, office, bathroom, car, garden, pets, etc.) is your job and not the job of parents or servants. Servants may clean the home once in a day, not every time the child makes a mess. It is a common sight in the East, especially in wealthy family homes, to see the mother or a servant picking up after the child who is a moving litter

creator. Children must learn that making a mess in the home or their own room is not acceptable. That their room is theirs but not to do with as they please. That the rules of the home apply even inside their room.

Children must be taught that value is not equal to cost. For example, the cost of learning may be negligible but the value of knowledge is immeasurable. And so the scholar must be respected and honored for his knowledge even if he is poor. The muddy handprints of your little daughter may well have ruined your Armani suit when she rushed to give you a hug as you returned from work, but the value of the hug is far more than the value of the suit and so you keep silent and return her hug with a bigger one and add a kiss as a bonus. The suit can be cleaned or replaced. The broken heart of a little girl is much more costly to repair. Children must be taught that the mud and brick structure that they live in is a house, not a home. And no matter how big yours is, there is always another somewhere else which is bigger, shinier, taller, wider, and more beautiful. How expensive or big it is does not show how happy and contented the people who live in it are. And it is the happiness and contentment that make it home, not mud and brick.

Possessions add cost, not value.

Teach them to use things and value people; not to value things and use people.

Teach them that toys break while friendship grows.

Children must be taught that humans have more intrinsic value than anything material which can be bought, sold, or junked. That cars, brands, clothing, watches, gadgets, material possessions, expensive houses don't add value to the people who use them. Anyone sensible will seek to add value to himself, not cost. People who believe that possessions add value or seek to convince others of this, have no value for themselves. They have low self-esteem and are seeking to lower the value of the human being. Children must be taught that a car, no matter how expensive, is

transportation, not a symbol, except of poor financial sense. It is bad judgment which makes someone put huge amounts of money into a depreciating asset.

The things you own end up owning you. ~ Tyler Durden

A shirt is a piece of clothing, not a statement. A watch is meant to tell the time, not to tell the world. And shoes are meant to walk in, not to define the worth of the one who is in them. None of these define you, are not statements, nor indicators of what kind of human being you are. It is your character, your actions, what you stand for, your principles and your values which define you. Not what you possess. What you possess can be stolen or taken away from you. Your character, your values, your principles are the stuff of memories that you leave behind. By these you will be remembered, honorably or otherwise. Live a life such that you will be remembered with honor. Teach children these things by personal example. That is the only way to teach them because children listen with their eyes. They don't care what you say until they see what you do.

Children must be taught the value of money. The value of earning it, of investing it, of making it earn for you. They must learn the difference between spending and investing. They must be trained to be wealth creators, not wealth spenders. They must be taught that spending is to incur an expense for something that can give no return and depreciates in value. Investing is to incur an expense for something that gives a return. Spenders are fools who don't know how to use their money. Investors are smart value creators who will get richer and richer and are able to help others and build their own Aakhira. Let them see those who buy expensive cars, handbags, watches, jewelry and clothes; who spend money on expensive tickets to watch sports matches, races and mindless entertainment in the light of this criterion. And then let them see others who spend far less, on books, learning, helping others, and investing in earning assets, using the same criterion. Then let them decide who they want to emulate.

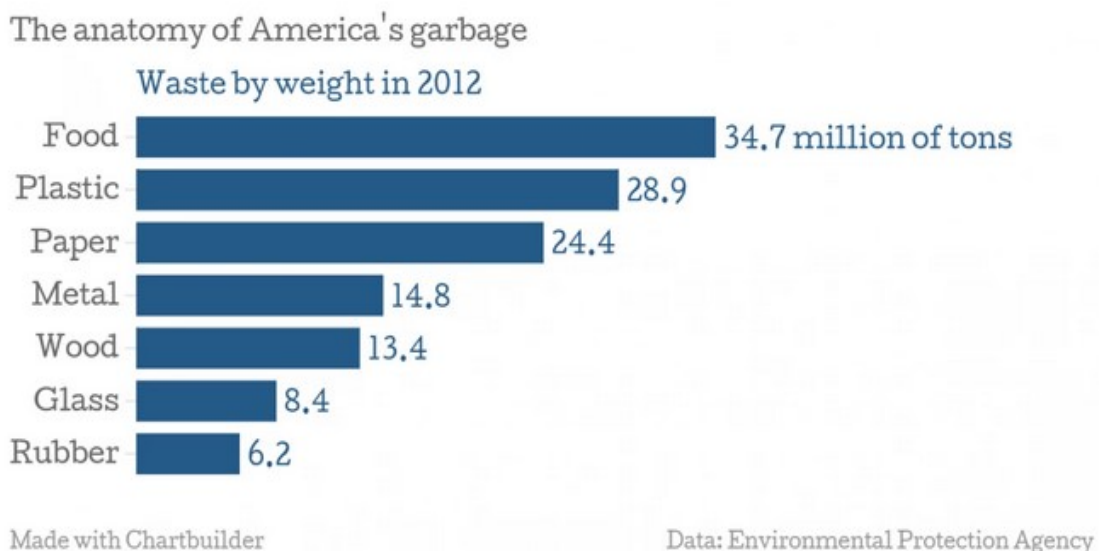
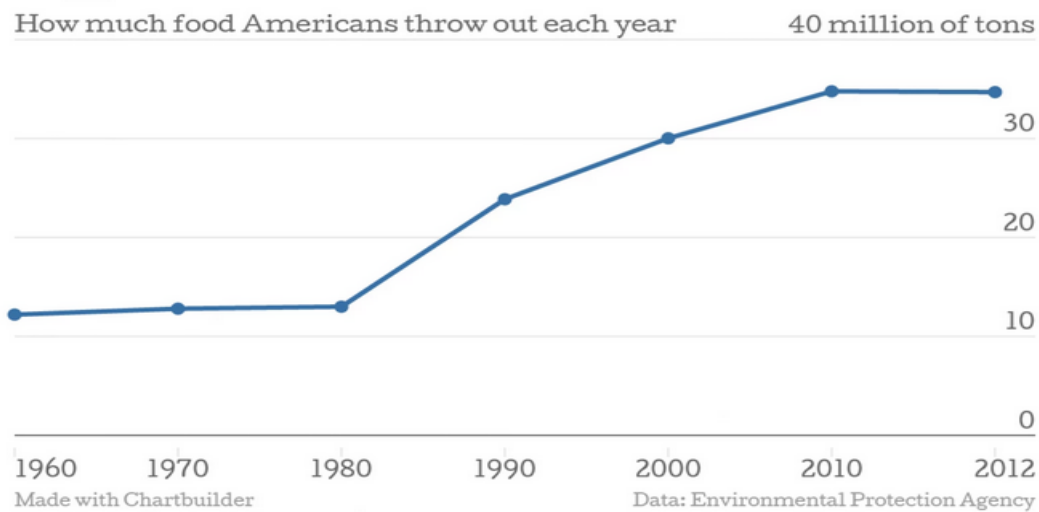
Children learn to handle money by actually handling money. So give them an allowance and then ask them to present monthly P&L accounts and an annual Balance Sheet. See what the headings are, under which they spent their allowance. See if they have found ways to make their allowance earn for them instead of simply spending it on consumables. Show them the alternatives they may have missed. Once children see how they will actually gain and have more money by this kind of thinking, you have won. See if they spent some money on the welfare of others. Is there a heading called Charity? Guide them by example. Teach them to be rich. Because being rich or poor is a state of mind. Not of how much you possess.

Please see Four Horsemen to understand how our global financial system works and how they have legalized bank robbery and how they create financial crises to make billions out of them. It is essential, while being robbed, to understand how we are being robbed. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fbvquHSPJU>

When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of people living together in society, they create for themselves in the course of time, a legal system that authorizes it and a moral code that glorifies it. ~ Frederic Bastiat

Teach them to make their own Balance Sheets for the Aakhira – what will they leave behind here in this life for which they will have to give account to Allah ﷻ and what will they receive from Allah ﷻ on account of what they spent to please Him. And when you have seen their Balance Sheets, show them your own. Children listen with their eyes and learn from example. Teach them to connect with Allah ﷻ and to take from His treasures. Let them taste the sweetness of Tawakkul. Let them feel the thrill of cutting the rope. Teach them how to ask Allah ﷻ so that He will give. Show them how to bank with Allah ﷻ.

As we bring up our children, so we create the society we live in. We have succeeded in creating a society that is rich in resources and poor in the willingness to share. That is why we have hunger and poverty. Our society is rich in material and poor in morals and spirit. That is why we have evil and sin. Our society is rich in information but poor in wisdom. That is why the most 'educated' nations among us are the most barbaric. That is why we have people in some countries starving to death while the UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs report (<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reducing-and-managing-waste/supporting-pages/food-waste>) says, *"We throw away 7.2 million tonnes of food and drink from our homes every year, the majority of which could have been eaten. This costs us £12 billion a year, harms the environment and wastes resources. In the UK food industry, waste is estimated to cost £5 billion per year."* Add the two and you have £17 billion of food waste in Britain alone. And in case you think this is a case of the bad British, here's what Washington Post says about food waste in America. (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2014/09/23/americans-throw-out-more-food-than-plastic-paper-metal-or-glass/>) I quote from this article, *"In 2012, the most recent year for which estimates are available, Americans threw out roughly 35 million tons of food, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. That's almost 20 percent more food than the United States tossed out in 2000, 50 percent more than in 1990, and nearly three times what Americans discarded in 1960, when the country threw out a now seemingly paltry 12.2 million tons."*



The report also states, "Every year, consumers in rich countries waste almost as much food (222 million tonnes) as the entire net food production of sub-Saharan Africa (230 million tonnes)."

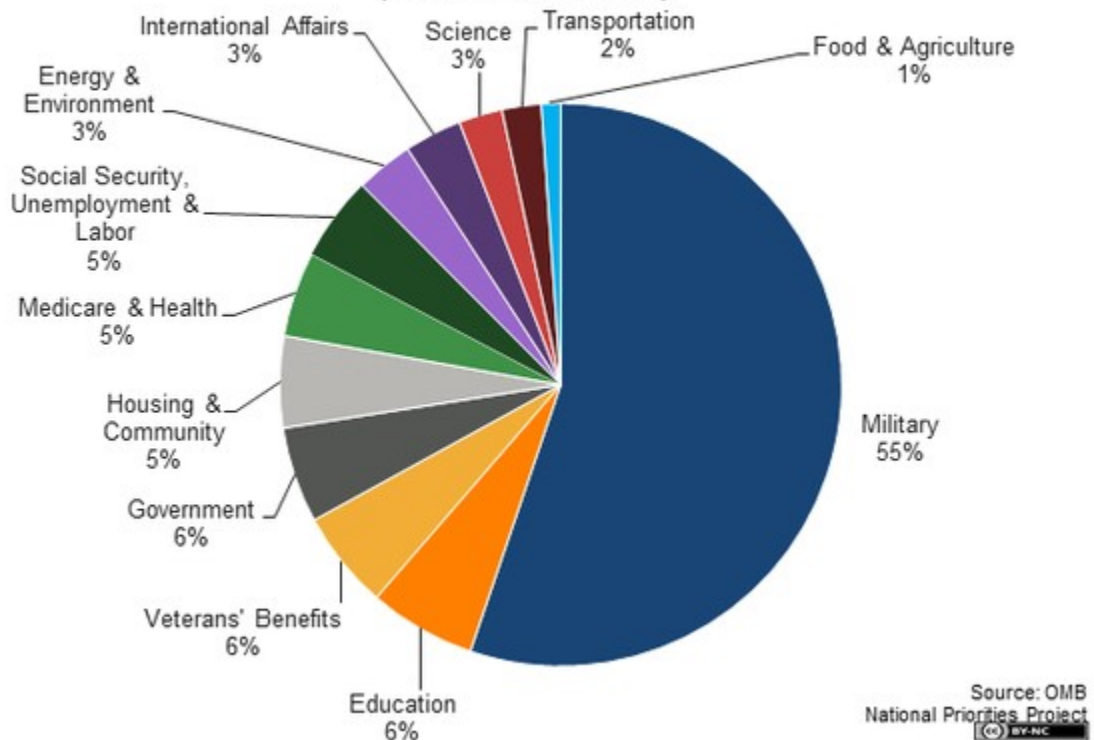
Is this an issue of food production, distribution, or simply of lack of concern for others?

We have created a society that has concentrated power and wealth in the hands of a few who have no concern for others. These are people who have the resources to actually create a world without hunger, educated, with proper medical care, where there are none homeless and which is free from crime. A world incidentally which will be far better off materially, with a much stronger market demand and ability to pay for goods and services. Being charitable and concerned for others is not only morally sound but makes good business sense. Read, C. K. Prahalad's book; *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*. However instead of this, these 'smart' people have created a world that has the capability of destroying itself forty times over. Nobody stops to ask how this will happen the second time, let alone for another thirty-eight times. *Dr. David Romei says, "Look at how one spends his money and you will know his priorities; so with people, so with nations."*

The graph below is for the United States of America for Fiscal Year 2105; President's Discretionary Spending. If you spend 55% on the military compared to 5% on Medicare & Health, 1% on Food & Agriculture, 5% on Housing & Community and no mention of education, what does it say about the truth of our alleged commitment to peace, harmony and freedom?

America leads the world in priorities and focus. What kind of world are we creating?

President's Proposed Discretionary Spending (Fiscal Year 2015)



<https://www.nationalpriorities.org/budget-basics/federal-budget-101/spending/>

How does all this relate to the raising of children? Well, every one of those taking those decisions was once a child. His parents wrote his script. He added to it and here's the result. The correction has to begin in the home.

<http://m.deccanherald.com/content/352942/india-wastes-rs-44000-cr.html/>

In India (2013) we waste Rs. 44,000 Crore worth of food every year. Wasted fruits and vegetables amount to Rs. 13,000 Crore. 15-20% of cooked food at weddings and in restaurants is also wasted.

India produces 250 million tonnes of food grain but consumes on 220-225 million and 250 million people go to bed hungry every night. A report released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Development (2012) stated that 48% of

children are stunted indicating that half the country's children suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Is this an issue of food production, distribution, or simply of lack of concern for others? My question to you is, 'Now that you know all this, what are you planning to do about it? How will your awareness of this information help those who are in need?' We need to answer this question because when we meet Allah ﷻ we will not be asked, 'What happened?' We will be asked, 'What did you do?'

Some facts about the Muslim world

- There are an estimated 1,476,233,470 Muslims on the face of the planet: one billion in Asia, 400 million in Africa, 44 million in Europe and six million in the Americas.
- Every fifth human being is a Muslim. For every single Hindu there are two Muslims, for every Buddhist there are two Muslims and for every Jew there are one hundred Muslims.
- There are 57 member-countries of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and all of them put together have around 500 universities; one university for every three million Muslims.
- The United States has 5,758 universities and India has 8,407
- In 2004, Shanghai's Jiao Tong University compiled an 'Academic Ranking of World Universities', and intriguingly, not one university from Muslim-majority states was in the top 500.
- The five top are Stanford, Harvard, MIT, Oxford & Cambridge

Conclusion

The Muslim world lacks the capacity to produce knowledge!

Facts

- Daily newspapers per 1,000 people and number of book titles per million are two indicators of whether knowledge is being diffused in a society.
- In Pakistan, there are 23 daily newspapers per 1,000 Pakistanis while the same ratio in Singapore is 360.
- In the UK, the number of book titles per million stands at 2,000 while the same in Egypt is 20.

Conclusion

The Muslim world is failing to diffuse knowledge.

Facts

- Exports of high technology products as a percentage of total exports are an important indicator of knowledge application.
- Pakistan's export of high technology products as a percentage of total exports stands at 1%
- Saudi Arabia is 0.3 per cent; Kuwait, Morocco, and Algeria are all at 0.3 per cent, while Singapore is at 58 per cent.

Conclusion

The Muslim world is failing to apply knowledge

Facts

- The combined annual GDP of 57 OIC countries combined is under \$2 trillion.
- America, just by itself, produces goods and services worth \$12 trillion; in China \$8 trillion, in Japan \$3.8 trillion and Germany \$2.4 trillion (purchasing power parity basis).
- Oil rich Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Qatar collectively produce goods and services (mostly oil) worth \$500 billion

- Catholic Spain alone produces goods and services worth over \$1 trillion, Catholic Poland \$489 billion and Buddhist Thailand \$545 billion.

Conclusion

Muslim GDP as a percentage of World GDP is fast declining.

Influence

Is a factor of the production, diffusion and application of knowledge to create wealth and wellbeing. Let us see where we stand in this respect.

International Space Station (ISS)

- 15 country collaboration
- Political/ideological enmity – but collaborate for scientific discovery
- Not a single Muslim country
- 16 sunrises & sunsets viewed daily
- But not a single one to say سبحان الله

So are you surprised at the state of the Muslim world? A billion sheep are still sheep. A billion sheep are less powerful than one tiger

It is this self-centered thinking that has given rise to the so-called 'Rat Race'. It will not be out of place to share some thoughts and reflections on what the Rat Race is and how to beat it because as they say, 'The problem with the Rat Race is that even if you win, you are still a rat.'

A friend once asked me to show him a way to get out of the rat race and on the spur of the moment I said, 'Become a cat.' Then I reflected on the qualities that a cat

represents and those which a rat represents and I tried to see how these can help us to create life quality and satisfaction. What differentiates a rat from a cat? And how does that help us? That is what this is about. One word of caution; like all analogies this also ends at a point. The point being that this is meant for people, not rats or cats. So please don't get too stuck to the zoology and remain with the concept and philosophy of how we can power-up our lives.

Rat versus Cat

Now what distinguishes the Rat from the Cat? In my view it is focus that distinguishes the Rat in the Rat Race from the Cat which is watching from his perch.

In the Rat Race, the focus is self-aggrandizement & destructive competition:

There is constant comparison with others. This produces dissatisfaction with one's own situation and so one strives harder to beat the other. Naturally this focus also produces the need to show off, because what is the use of gain if it can't be flaunted? People don't feel good because they have more, but because they have more than others do. So if everyone had the same or similar, if everyone developed, the satisfaction would be less. One feels very satisfied not by being wealthy but by being more wealthy than one's friends, companions, family, and being able to show off that wealth so that others feel jealous, envious, frustrated.

Since material things are easier to accumulate and display, the focus of the Rat Race is very materialistic. People build houses not to create warm and loving homes but to create edifices to their egos. They fill them with artifacts bought in antique stores that arrived there from the houses of other rats of times gone by, who also filled their houses with artifacts from the homes of still other rats gone by.

Little do they reflect on the irony of this. For rats, cars are not a means of transportation but statements of their position in society. Weddings are not about the young people starting a new life but an opportunity for the parents to flaunt their wealth. Victims of the Rat Race beg to be invited to such 'high society weddings' and then gaze with longing eyes at all that they are never likely to have and go home and complain about how wasteful the hosts were and in what bad taste their party was. This is because rat parties are not about meeting friends and feeling good, but about looking to see what others wore and feeling bad. That is why all the good feeling of wearing a nice dress or a good piece of jewelry becomes saw dust in the mouth the moment they see another person wearing a huge rock on a rope.

Aah!! And of course in the Rat Race there is a great deal of rejoicing in the misfortunes of others. Nothing is more satisfying than to talk about the robbery in someone's house in which they lost all their jewelry or the accident in which their Bentley was totaled. All this is of course spoken of in pained tones, but one only has to look into the eyes to see the undisguised glee in them. Rat societies are very uncaring places in which personal gain is the only consideration. Means, fair or foul, are not a matter of interest to anyone. Results justify the means. As long as I gain, it does not matter how I gained. It matters even less at whose expense I gained. Moral values, codes of behavior, principles, religion are all means to be used in gaining advantage over others. There is no real loyalty to any of these things.

They are tools to be used, ruthlessly and without apology and to be cast aside when they are no longer useful. In the end, worship is only of the self and of personal desire.

Since accumulation of material possessions is essential to win in the Rat Race, rats become stingy and hoard resources. They won't share what they have with others because it will reduce their own store. Even when some things they have may be time sensitive and can get spoilt or redundant unless they are used, rats will still

hoard them and will not give them to others or allow others to use their resources. Rats will also not share knowledge to ensure that others never have a chance to succeed.

Rat societies are characterized by a lack of education and disparities in learning and capability. Safety becomes the key driver. Risk taking disappears. Fear of losing possessions dominates all thinking and various means are sought to prevent that. Security agencies do good business in rat societies. Rats are unwilling to face the fact that societies in which disparities between people are less or non-existent, crime automatically disappears. Rats don't like to face this fact because in order for disparities to disappear, wealthy rats must share their wealth. But this goes against the very grain of rat-ness, especially since the source of all satisfaction is to see that others have less than you. So there is a vested interest in rat societies to ensure that disparities remain.

Interestingly, this focus on the other also produces complacency. When you have more than others and when everyone else is staring at you in envy, then there is no need to strive for more. So enterprise dies once a certain amount of stuff has been accumulated as there is nobody left to impress or there is too much to protect. Real progress, be it in knowledge or power, stops as rats don't like to take risk. Risk is essential to stretch the boundaries of the known and explore ways of dealing with the unknown. Risk is essential to learn how much more one can achieve.

But risk has within it the possibility of failure. Since rats are afraid of failure, as this can result in their losing some of their possessions, they hate risk and constantly seek safety. So progress stops.

Since satisfaction comes only in comparison with others, rats in power are despotic and tyrannical. It is from seeing others kowtowing to them that they get a sense of wellbeing. Loyalty to the king rat becomes the primary virtue. Questioning of those

in power or of whatever they stand for is the cardinal sin. Rat societies become inward looking and lose perspective and vision. The boundary between the ruler and the state disappears. The ruler says, "I am the state." Difference of opinion is seen as opposition and disagreement with or disapproval of those in power becomes treason. Rat societies equate the government with the country and disagreement with one is seen as disloyalty to the other. That is why in the Rat Race, even if you win, you are still a rat.

Ask yourself: How many rats do you know? And is one of them the one you see in the mirror?

Now let us look at what it is to be a Cat.

The Cat is focused primarily on himself but unlike the rat the cat focuses on developing its skill as a hunter. Cats don't hoard, so every day is a new opportunity to hunt. To improve skills, to learn from previous mistakes, to take risk and pit one's own strengths and talents against external forces. If cats are not successful in the hunt, they sleep hungry. Hunger is a great driver. Cats teach their hunting skills to their children and group mates because the survival of the whole pride depends on the skills of everyone (Lions are also cats, right?). Cats don't live in a fixed place and cover huge ranges in order to find prey. So they necessarily develop perspective. They learn to create strategies for a successful hunt. Cats know that their own survival depends on the wellbeing of the entire pride and so they care for one another.

For the Cat, the focus is self-development and collaboration.

Arising out of this, I have identified some key characteristics which I believe if a person develops he will become entrepreneurial in nature and will become a winner

in all ways. I have described them in detail below but the way I conceptualize them is as one arising from the other in a glow of goodness. Becoming a cat is a lifelong journey of delight. For cats don't die. They turn into mist that rises from the forest at dawn.

Faith is the Foundation of Courage

Faith: A small word that has a big meaning. It can mean different things to different people, so let me define what I mean by 'Faith.' Faith is a dynamic process that is based on the individual's understanding of himself or herself in the context of physical, intellectual, psychological, and spiritual strength. That is why self-awareness and emotional understanding is very important. Based on this s/he takes risk and has success which reinforces the faith. When there is a failure, if they analyze it and create a new strategy that also reinforces the faith. Otherwise, faith can be shaken, sometimes with failures.

Faith is the sure knowledge that one will succeed in one's endeavor. To do all that is required and then to trust that the result will be favorable. This may sound irrational. But it is a very critical element of the combination. It is the final ingredient in the mix that produces success. Without faith you reach the end of your strength and find nothing to sustain you across the leap...the leap of faith. I like to use the words of Barbara Winters to describe faith: **"When you come to the end of the light of all that you know and are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things will happen; there will be something firm to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly."**

Faith is knowing with complete certainty that Allahﷻ will do what He promised in the Qur'an:

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا

وَيَرْزُقُهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ

Talaaq 65: 2-3: "For the one who has consciousness of Allah (and fears His displeasure – has taqwa) Allah will extract him from all his difficulties. And will provide him from sources that he could not imagine. For the one who has faith in Allah, verily He (Allah) will become sufficient for him."

It is this faith that gives courage. The courage to take the unpopular stance. To speak the truth before the tyrant. To stand up for the oppressed. To do what needs to be done no matter how difficult. To follow your dream. It is this faith that lights the path on the long, dark road in the late reaches of the night when all about you are asleep and you are sitting wondering if the road that you have chosen to walk is really worth it or not. When human awareness and resistance to adversity is at its lowest, faith is the small, clear voice in your heart which tells you that what you are doing is right and gives you the courage to carry on.

Courage Enables Risk-taking

When one operates with courage, taking risk becomes possible. Courage is not what you have before you start. It is what comes when you take the first step. When you first stand up, your heart is fluttering, your knees are weak and your throat is dry. But as you stand up and all eyes turn to you, a cool breeze blows and you suddenly find steel inserted into your spine. You stand taller, your senses are enhanced, your eyes are bright and the voice that comes out of your throat is firm and confident. It is as if you are standing to one side listening to yourself speaking words you did not know you had in you. Explaining things that were themselves unclear to you until then. Yet when you start to speak, you find that not only do the concepts become clear but you are able to explain them with examples that take people's breath away in that moment of "Aha!!!" that comes not too often, but is remembered for all time

when it does. What you had thought of as risky until then seems so easy and winning inevitable. And all that you are aware of is the excitement of it all.

Risk-taking Creates Excitement

Excitement is the adrenalin flow no doubt. But more importantly it is the door that opens onto the vista of new possibilities; of things unspoken and only dreamt of until then; of concepts still in the shadows on the far boundary of knowledge; of what may be, of what can become. Imagine that you have just reached the top of a steep mountain pass. It was a long, hard climb, at times even dangerous, but you made it. And now you step into the pass towards the gap in the rock that is like a doorway. As you enter the door, you come to the lip of the escarpment that overlooks a valley spread out below at your feet. Undulating grassland, hints of blue suggesting a stream flowing into a lake in the far distance, clumps of thick shade trees, the distant cacophony of parakeets and other birds flying around from tree to tree eating at will. The mist rising in the early morning from the forest floor. Myriad smells, sights, and sounds. A cool breeze comes up to greet you and invite you to step forward taking the first step on the path leading to what new discoveries you don't know yet. I will leave you to imagine the rest. Fill it with the images you want.

Experience the shortness of breath, the sparkling of your eyes the warmth of the early morning sun on your face, the hint of coming rain. Not the rain that spells cold and damp. But the life giving rain that the dry earth prays for and waits every day. This is the excitement that creates energy, commitment and drive, for excitement after all is also fear but which anticipates a happy ending.

Excitement Drives Passion

Passion soars on the wings of excitement. When a person works with passion all the forces of nature collaborate to help him. Much can be done with little. All the numbers add up correctly. Time slows down to let him finish his task. The train

comes on time. The taxi man returns to him the things that he forgot in the cab when he got off. Passion invokes passion. Others who come into contact with the person who works with passion get energized. Suddenly, they start to see meaning in what they do which until then they had been doing mechanically. People who work with passionate people report an enhanced sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. They look forward to each day, to be with their leader and to do what pleases him.

I believe most firmly that one must identify what one is passionate about and develop expertise in it. Then when one does that work there is no stress for one is doing what one loves. It is but natural that if you love something and learn to do it, you will do it well. There is a clear difference between the work of someone who is merely doing a job and another who is answering a calling. For one it is earning a living at best. For the other it is fulfillment of his life's purpose. It is answering a Covenant. Imagine a life that is led, every day of which is a joy to live. That is what being passionate bestows on you.

Passion drives Excellence

It is but natural that someone who is passionate about something will want to do it in the best possible manner. And that is what excellence is all about. To continuously search for a better way, a more profitable, compassionate, beautiful or exciting way to accomplish the goal. It is excellence which makes you do that which the world may consider strange. Excellence is to care more than others think is wise; to risk more than others think is safe; to dream more than others think is practical; and to expect from oneself more than others think is possible. It is only in the search for excellence that new discoveries are made and better ways are found. It is not competing against others but a race to achieve one's own potential by pushing the boundaries of one's own knowledge, capability, power and influence. Striving for excellence generates respect, attracts followers and enhances one's influence.

Excellence creates Brand

And in the end the result of this virtuous spiral is 'differentiation'.

Why differentiate? Because differentiation creates brand. Brand creates loyalty. Loyalty creates influence and it is the foundation of leadership. Brand creates identity. It enables the leader to stand out and not blend in with the crowd. It makes him the standard bearer to whose standard the others rally. It makes him the light in the darkness which those who are lost seek, to find the way once again. Positive differentiation creates customers who are loyal and who choose you over your competitors. Producers of products and services strive to differentiate from their competition in ways that are desirable to their customers and which address a particular key need of their clients so that their clients will choose their product or service over that of their competitors'. The same logic applies in human development. The drive for excellence enables the person to create that positive differentiation which makes him a brand in himself.

And that is the essence of being a Cat. To be the best that you can be, without worrying about what the other is doing. You still do the best that you can do even if nobody is looking. You behave with grace, nobility, compassion, wisdom, and honor not because of what others are doing or not doing but because you are YOU. You do it because your behavior defines you and it arises from your beliefs and values. You do, so you get, so you are. And that is what your legacy is. To live the message that success is to do the best that you can do because only that is worthy of you.

In conclusion I want to say that the biggest challenge of parenting is to accept that we are facing a world that is very different from the one we grew up in. This is true irrespective of which country you live in with the additional complexity of a rapid destruction of walls between cultures. The truth is that your solutions don't work today and your children know this better than anyone else. Yet you still have the

challenge to inspire, support and teach them. Your challenge is to prepare them for a world that you know nothing about. This can be seen as positive or negative depending on your point of view but one thing is certain and that is, it will not leave you untouched.

The major Global Challenges that we face are:

Information exchange

Thanks mainly to the internet and to global TV channels we are in an information overload phase. We don't suffer from lack of information but from a surfeit of it – easily available at the click of a mouse. What is missing is the ability to discern, to sift, to pick the nuggets. What is missing is the ability to know what to do with what we read or see. What is missing is the ability to connect the dots to complete the picture. What is missing is the ability to recognize the reality and to put things in perspective so that we can differentiate between real information and propaganda. What is missing is the ability to respond positively and powerfully to ensure that the dissenting voice is also heard in the cacophony of the dominant discourse.

Easy information exchange has also lowered and in many cases wiped out the entry barriers into technologies and business areas. This opens new opportunities for entrepreneurs provided they know how to use them. It is a challenge for parents to guide their children in ways that enable them not only to make sense of what they see and read but to actually leverage it for themselves and others.

The information exchange also has a darker side with every evil that happens in the world getting instant limelight. The conscious self is bombarded daily with images which at one time would have sent us into depression but which leave us untouched and unmoved today. This desensitization of the heart, the deadening of compassion, making the horrific mundane is the result of constant exposure to cruelty, oppression and bloodshed. Like the nurse in the operating theatre or the butcher in

the abattoir, the sight of another's suffering leaves us untouched. The Salaf used to be very concerned with exposing oneself to things that harden the heart. Imam Al-Ghazali used to say that one should not mention death while eating because if the heart is not deadened then you will not be able to eat. And if you are able to eat then it will become evident to everyone that your heart is dead. I don't think we bother with such niceties anymore because the condition of our hearts is apparently not of any consequence to us. The challenge that parents have is to guide children such that their hearts don't harden and show them how they can help those in need. Hidden in this is also the real danger of radicalization of youth and their falling into the trap of those who seek to recruit them for cannon fodder. It is our challenge to help them to retain perspective, show them how they can positively contribute and stay away from all extremist positions. But to do all that we need to check what state our own hearts are in for only the seeing can guide the blind.

Technology empowers/threatens

The second challenge we face is that of technology. Like rain, it is a part of our lives. You either get wet or you learn to use an umbrella. The smart phone, the computer, social networking and the ever present Google. Google maps automatically gives me driving directions to the masjid on Fridays whether or not I ask for them. It tells me if a flight that I am booked on is late or not. It even tells me when I need to leave for the airport, even when I have not asked for this information or informed it about my present location. It knows without being told. So how difficult is it to believe that Allah ﷻ, who created the creator of Google and his brain, also knows?

Technology takes away the drudgery and monotony. It adds value and makes life easy. But at the same time it increases distraction, creates a false sense of satisfaction and speed. People feel satisfied with posting likes on Facebook and making favorites on Twitter as if they actually accomplished something. They forget that a million likes don't put a piece of bread into the mouth of the starving child or save it from

the bullet of a sniper. Instant gratification – the most dominant sign of an immature intellect – is one of the legacies of technology, albeit unintentional. We forget that if you want results you have to work very hard at the right things; not merely click a mouse or tap a touch screen. This results in unjustified frustration and the millennial personality is born. People who are literally disinterested in the future. What can you hope for with respect to creating a legacy from those whose main interest is the next sensation?

We have a mentality that always seeks more and more excitement. Steve Irvin (Crocodile Hunter) is a good example of this and its unwitting result – taking closer and closer chances with dangerous animals until one day the inevitable happened. But the result is that today if you want to make an animal encounter show, until you can put your head into a lion's mouth and obviously come out alive, the producers won't even look at you. And the value of doing so? Well, when you measure everything in terms of TRP ratings, that is perfectly clear, isn't it?

Speed of response that technology enables is both a competitive advantage and a threat. Our own response to events has to be hugely faster than our parents' needed to be because every event is instantly global news. The repercussions of the thoughtless word are also serious and in some cases severe. But what remains constant is that artificial intelligence is not the same as natural and technology doesn't replace wisdom. We still need the human intellect to interpret the event and color the picture to see the whole scene.

Cultural influence

As I mentioned, the influence of other cultures is so invasive and powerful that merely trying to guard against it by prohibiting TV is futile. Children are exposed to other cultures all through their day. What needs to be done is to demonstrate to them the value of our culture in such a way as to enable them to take pride in it,

while still respecting other cultures. This is essential because the usual approach of running down everything else creates walls and doesn't promote cross cultural understanding. How to learn without becoming judgmental while retaining our own sense of right and wrong? This is a complex issue and something that needs to be learnt before one can teach it. The most critical part of this is to retain an open mind while being clear about the boundaries of Islam. One must be confident without becoming bigoted. This is critical to presenting Islam also because you can't present an alternate perspective without understanding and respecting the perspective of your partner. We live in the most God-conscious country in the world. The majority of people in this country are pious and seek the pleasure of the Almighty. The difference of opinion we have with them is about the identity of the Almighty. But we must appreciate their desire to seek Him and His pleasure.

The modern world has also created myriad new career options which bring with them new dilemmas & questions. In short your life history doesn't work anymore. Our challenge is to prepare them for a world that we know nothing about. But you signed up for that job when you had a child.

Just to give you a small peek at what I mean please consider the following:

The top 10 – in demand jobs in 2010 did not exist in 2004. In the year 2000, Google (founded 1998 but public in 2004), Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), YouTube (2005) and Whatsapp (2009) didn't exist. We all lived in a world without the things we consider critical to survival today. And for the most part we lived happily. These things apart from their nuisance value do have some positive uses, create jobs and hugely influence our perception the world, our social behavior, our buying preferences, who we look up to and who we look down on. Today it is thanks only to Facebook and YouTube that a lot of modern scholars have more popularity than Imam Ahmed and Imam Abu Hanifa had in their days. It is not the depth of their knowledge but our slavery to these technologies that has colored our perception

such that the first thing people ask is, 'How many videos does he have on YouTube?' As if that is one of the questions of the Day of Judgment.

These technologies and the gadgets they come in, take up huge amounts of our time and create anxiety, stress and anguish over pointless things. They rule our hearts and minds if we allow them to. And they make some very smart people insane amounts of money at our expense. How are we going to explain the dangers of all this to our children when we are ourselves the victims of these technologies? The solution is not discarding them. That would be like pretending it was not raining when it was. You would only get wet. Also as I mentioned there are positive aspects to them which we can and must use. The key is to be able to differentiate and use, not become the used and manipulated. Our challenge is to prepare children for challenges that don't exist yet using technologies that haven't been invented. The reality is that today's solution is often tomorrow's problem. If you need a reminder, think of plastics. There are many here who remember a plastic free world and the delight with which we welcomed plastics when they came into our lives. As they say, the rest is history.

The total amount of technical information is doubling every two years. This means that for a student in a 4 year course, what he learnt in Year – 1 is already outdated in Year – 3. So what is the use of our traditional teaching – both what we teach and how we do it needs to change. Frankly it doesn't need to change; it needs a decent burial and a new system needs to be born. Finland, which is famous for its educational system has decided to stop teaching subjects completely and teach application instead. I had proposed that in 2002 in my vision statement for the SBA. Without understanding application we have the pathetic situation of our children going to school for 15 years and coming out completely innocent of anything remotely useful. Their minds are filled with disconnected pieces of information that's perhaps individually useful but because they never learnt the relationships or how to use that information in real life, they lose all interest in the subject itself. In the real world

they are completely incapable of survival itself, let alone being able to influence, guide, command or even earn a decent living. Fifteen years of schooling only puts them on the threshold of another decade perhaps of studying to qualify to stand in the line for a job.

What never ceases to amaze me is how the insanity of it doesn't strike anyone and we still continue to donate serious amounts of money to the system that does nothing for us. Those who send their children to big name schools with high fees, ask your child what he or she learned that can help them to survive one week on their own and you will know what your money bought for you. Ask if your money bought you good manners, compassion, the ability to have an intelligent conversation, write a decent letter or cook a decent meal; let alone Taqwa, Ta'alluq Ma'Allah, respect for the Sunnah, confidence in Islam or in their own culture. What it probably did buy you is recalcitrant attitudes, arrogance, embracing the worst values of the West instead of the best, enslavement to gadgets and brands and a burning desire to go to Europe or America to study immediately after graduating from school but at your expense and not on their own merit. An entitlement mentality that is the cancer which is at the root of all degeneration and family disputes, especially in business families. Most sadly it probably also bought an attitude of looking down on others including in many cases, their own parents who pay their bills. And to think of it, none of this was promised in the prospectus when you put your child in the school, was it? Talk about the Aha! Experience and getting value for your money!

So what to do? Solution: Win the RACE. What race? RACE is my acronym for what you need to do to deal with the challenge of raising children you can be proud of. RACE stands for Read, Anticipate, Create and Execute.

Read

Reading has become a redundancy and this is the root cause of most of our problems. Not reading disconnects us from our own history, our culture, religion and from Allahﷻ. Reading enables us to know what is happening, to put it in perspective and to anticipate problems and opportunities – two names for the same thing. So ask yourself how many books you read every month. Ignorance is not bliss. It is ugly and shameful. So start reading. Read and encourage your children to read. Read and analyze and discuss and debate. See what questions they ask. The questions are much more important than answers. Let powerful questions arise in the mind and answer them yourself or find others who can answer them. Cultivate the company of those who read and who have intelligent conversations – not Gheeba (backbiting and slander) disguised as social talk. Cultivate the company of scholars of all kinds of knowledge. Go to them and take your children with you. Don't worry if your children tell you that they can't understand anything that is being said. That is a sign of the result of the kind of upbringing you gave them and what they failed to learn in school. Consider it a sign of sickness. That is why you took them there, to stretch their minds and to expose them to the expanse of knowledge. What you hear today and don't understand gets stored in the memory and comes to your aid years later at unexpected moments. You need to change your habits and your social life. If your social life consists of attending random weddings and re-eating biryani then none of what I have said will be possible. You have to do first what you want your children to do. Make no mistake. To give you must first have.

Anticipate

Learn to read the signs both in your children and in the environment and prepare for them by being proactive. Combative and harsh attitudes usually get negative results. You need to be able to reason and convince, not force. To reason and convince you need to have knowledge and be convinced yourself. Brings us back to reading.

Another great resource is the company of wise people. Wisdom begins with Taqwa so people who disobey Allah ﷻ by definition can't be wise, though they may have some skills or some specific knowledge. Seek the company of the Muttaqoon who obey Allah ﷻ and follow the Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ.

Monitor your conversations. Monitor your company. Who do you meet with your children? Who are your children exposed to? What are they likely to learn from them? Make sure you keep the right company and expose your children to the right company. Most children today spend time with their own age groups. The question is, what can a fifteen year old teach another fifteen year old? Children need the company of wise and knowledgeable elders to learn life skills. This is how mammals learn – from elders. Sohbat say Sahaba banay. The Sahaba learnt from the Sohbat (companionship) of the Prophet ﷺ. Our children are starved of the Sohbat of wise elders and the tragedy is that most are not even aware of what they are losing.

Create

Now that you have an idea of the challenges ahead and you have anticipated how some of them are likely to touch you and your children, create solutions. Teach tools because your answers don't work anymore. Teach tools because they are timeless and can be applied to all kinds of problems. Among the most important tools are:

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| 1. How to connect to Allah ﷻ | 6. Take ownership – no excuses |
| 2. The power of dua | 7. Structured thinking |
| 3. Disciplined living | 8. Focused reading |
| 4. Drive for excellence | 9. Social graces and manners |
| 5. Managing money – earn/not spend | 10. Humility – No arrogance |

Execute

Finally execute, implement, because only results can be banked, as the saying goes. You must create a schedule to impart these skills and knowledge to your children. Parenting is a contact sport. You can't outsource it, no matter how competent the

care taker. And remember that children listen with their eyes. If you don't wake up for Fajr it is no good telling your child to pray Tahajjud. If you don't read, the child will not read. And if he reads because his teacher inspires him to do so, soon he will know more than you and that is shameful. Remember you signed up to raise your children the day you decided to have them. Whatever you did until now, it is time to take stock and ask yourself what you need to change. It is eye opening if you ask your children what they learned from you. I began this series of lectures by asking you how many of you had one of their parents as their role model and you know the pathetic result. Ask if you want your children to think the same? If not, the time to change is now.

It is simply not enough to feed, clothe and gadgetize your children and then leave them to their own devices except to refill their bellies or accounts. You have to get serious with their upbringing.

For the children an even more critical message: Remember that one of the seven who Allah ﷻ promised the shade of His Arsh on the day when there will be no shade except His, is the youth who grew up in obedience to Him. So this is a very critical time in your life. This is the power of the multiplier. During this stage every action of yours has a far higher reward than the reward of older people doing the same thing. Everything you do that is obedience of Allah ﷻ and the Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ and every temptation you reject because it is against the order of Allah ﷻ or the Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ will take you closer to Allah ﷻ, make your dua more accepted and be a witness for you on the Day of Judgement. This period of grace will end when you grow older. So focus on making the best of this time and don't lose this period of grace to please some loser who is your friend. The effect of friends, both positive and negative can't be overemphasized. It is huge. I constantly hear the lament after a final exam, 'I only got so many marks.' My question is, 'Why? Did they run out of stock?' Their answer is, 'Friends. My friends

who I gave more time to than to my studies.' I say to you, 'Wake up! Convert your friend to your way of being or delete him from your list. You can't afford losers as friends, no matter how cool they look. So get serious. We only live once. Let us live it right.'