

Motherhood in Islam

Session Eight

From the Holy Qur'an

77. Verily! They are enemies to me, save the Lord of the Worlds.

78. "Who has created me, and it is He Who guides me;

79. "And it is He Who feeds me and gives me to drink.

80. "And when I am ill, it is He who cures me;

81. "And Who will cause me to die, and then will bring me to life (again);

82. "And Who, I hope will forgive me my faults on the Day of Recompense, (the Day of Resurrection),"

83. My Lord! Bestow Wisdom on me, and join me with the righteous;

84. And grant me an honorable mention in later generations;

85. And make me one of the inheritors of the Paradise of Delight;

86. And forgive my father, verily he is of the erring;

87. And disgrace me not on the Day when (all the creatures) will be resurrected;

88. The Day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail,

89. Except him who brings to Allâh a clean heart

Sura Shuara, sura no.26

O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is man and stones. (66: 6)

From Hadith

The Holy Prophet (s) once looked at some children and said, *Woe be to the parents of the children of the last days! He was asked, O Messenger of Allah, parents who are polytheists? He replied, No parents who are believers. They will not teach them anything that is obligatory on them, and when their children learn [from other sources] they will refuse them. And they are pleased with what they gain of this world. I am far from them, and they are far from me.*

You are responsible for what has been entrusted to you, such as educating him in good conduct, pointing him in the direction of his Lord, and helping him to obey Him.

Imam Zaynul Abidin (a)

When a teacher teaches a child Bismillah, Allah grants for him, the child, and the parents, a safety from the Fire.

Holy Prophet (s)

Allah will bestow great rewards on parents, who will say, Our Lord! From where is this, when are our actions are not worthy of it? It will be said to them, this is because of teaching your child the Qur'an, and bringing him up according to the religion of Islam.

Imam Hasan al-Askari (a)

Teach your children religion before the disbelievers get to them.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a)

Habituate your children to Salât when they are seven years old.

Holy Prophet (s)

When a child reaches six years he should be taught the Ruku' and the Sajdah. When he completes seven years, he should be taught to wash his face and hands and told to pray.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a)

Teaching children about Beliefs

Belief in God and the other roots of religion come in three stages:

1. Through Fitrat (Natural Instinct). A child has the inner instinct to recognize and worship a Creator. All human beings have been created on that natural instinct, or Fitrat. Almighty Allah says, Then set your face upright for religion in the right state, *the nature made by Allah in which He has made men, there is no altering of Allah's creation, that is the right religion, but most people do not know.* (30:30) A hadith of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) says: *He [Allah] has created them all on the instinct of belief in One God.* Parents have the duty of awakening and strengthening this natural instinct in young children.

2. Through the intellect. This is establishing the existence of God, and the rationality of other beliefs, through logical proofs. This is done through thinking, asking questions, reading, seeking knowledge etc. The Holy Qur'an invites human beings to ponder over creation, and establish the existence of God.

3. Through the heart. This is a stage beyond that of the mind, where the human being accepts the beliefs with all his heart. His faith is not based on logic alone, but a deeper understanding that transcends the intellect and affects his entire being.

For parents of young children, it is enough to use the natural instinct in children to instill belief in God. The child is introduced to God as the Creator, the One who has blessed them with all they have. Simple conversations, prayers at home, stories etc. can all be used to teach the child about God. As the child grows, the mosque and the Madrasah are important in teaching the child about beliefs.

Apart from the belief in God, the child should also be taught about belief in the Prophets and Imams, as well as in the life hereafter.

Teaching children about Rituals

Although beliefs are most important, parents have also to teach the practical part of following religion. Faith and action go together. From a young age, a child should be encouraged to pray, recite the Qur'an, perform wudhu etc. Some parents think it is a bother to have young children do these things and wait until they are almost *baligh*. The

love for such actions does not develop, and many children then have to be forced to carry them out. It is much better to start at an age when children are willing to imitate the parents and have an interest in praying and doing wudhu.

The daily prayer is the most important action in Islam, and it is the duty of all parents to ensure that the child prays properly and regularly. A Hadith of the Holy Prophet (s) says: *Teach your children the prayer when they are seven, and beat them if they do not recite it when they are ten.* Thus when the child becomes *baligh* and does not wish to pray it is necessary to force him to do so. It should be mentioned that children need to be observed when they first begin to pray by themselves. Many children pray very quickly, and the actions resemble a quick exercise rather than a prayer. If possible, parents should try and pray with their children, at least sometimes. Encourage the child to follow the parent in prayer, as this will make the child pray slower and more carefully. If this is repeated enough times, it becomes a habit. It is not a good idea to tell children to pray by themselves in their rooms, out of the view of parents. This could encourage the child to skip prayers altogether, and then lie about it. Parents must not allow opportunities where children are tempted to lie. *Shaytan* is very strong, and a child is easy prey.

A hadith by Imam J'afar as-sadiq (a) on getting children accustomed to fasting says: *We enjoin our children to fast when they are seven years old, whatever part of the fast they are able to keep. So when it is midday or further [into the day], and thirst overcomes them, they break the fast, so that they become accustomed to fasting and can endure it.*

Another important part of religious training is to teach the child to recite the Qur'an. Many parents are already aware of this responsibility and strive to make their children good reciters of the Qur'an. But one must be wary not to do it to compete with others, or to show off to the community. Some children become fluent reciters of the Qur'an but are not regular in their prayers and are generally lax in their obedience to Allah. Fluency in Qur'an recitation is not a criteria. It is undoubtedly an asset. The child must also be encouraged to understand the Qur'an. This could be done through reading the translation occasionally, or even learning the Arabic language.

Teaching children about Akhlaq

This is an extremely important aspect of Islam and should not be ignored. Good morals are the key to a virtuous life. The child should be taught about noble characteristics such as honesty, kindness, justice, contentment etc. He should be taught to avoid jealousy, backbiting, greed, extravagance etc. Many opportunities come up in daily life for parents to bring up such issues. It is not necessary to give a lecture or nag. A small reminder, or a simple discussion often makes a lasting impression. Grandparents can play an influential role here. They could be asked to advise children and narrate stories to them. Many children remember the advice given to them by their parents and grandparents long into adulthood.

Encouraging children towards virtue

The Holy Prophet has said: *May Allah have mercy on the parent who helps his child towards virtue.* He was asked, *how can a parent help his child towards virtue?* He replied: *The parent accepts the little good the child does, does not demand what the child cannot do or what is difficult for the child to do, does not oppress the child so the child rebels, and does not deceive him or act unwisely with him.*

When parents impose religion on a child, and make great demands on the child, or teach the child negative thoughts about God and punishment for disobeying His Laws, children are discouraged. They may get into the habit of lying to protect themselves.

Methods of Religious Training

Be a model to your children

Actions speak much louder than words. No amount of advice of a parent to refrain from backbiting will work if the child often hears the parent backbiting himself. When the child is exposed to hypocrisy, lying, selfishness and other such qualities at home, it is very likely that he will grow up following the same. A good example from the parents works even without words. A child who grows up in a home where time of prayers is maintained, where hypocrisy in relations is avoided, and where contentment prevails, will grow up to do the same. Although it may seem a huge task to be able to be a good model for the child, parents should know that it is the only way they can really teach their children. No other way is as effective.

Relate stories

Stories are a very appealing way to teach lessons. The Holy Qur'an says after narrating the story of Prophet Yusuf (a); *In their narrations there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding.*(12:111)

Children are especially fascinated by stories. They can become absorbed in a story without realizing that they are learning some lessons. Many parents read to their children each day, especially when the children are young. It would be a good idea to occasionally read Islamic story books. Many of these are available today, with beautiful and colorful illustrations. Parents should use these to inspire children. As they begin to read by themselves, parents should encourage occasional reading of some good Islamic and moral books. When left to decide for themselves, children read a lot of junk literature. If it is not possible to avoid all of it, it should be at least minimized as much as possible. The child must be given alternative choices so that he can still read.

Questions and Answers

Children ask a lot of questions. Sometimes parents do not have the answers and must admit that they need to look it up. But it is unfair to ignore the questions or dismiss them as unimportant. The more they ask, the more they will learn. An interest in his questions and confusions will help the child develop his mental and intellectual abilities. Encourage the child to learn more by asking more, even if all the answers cannot be given immediately.