

PARENTING IS COUNSELLING: THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PARENT-CHILD IN ISLAM

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Abstract

The Holy Qur'an in its many commands and the Ḥadīth of Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam amplify the importance of parenting. Having said that, the same *Holy Qur'an* and the Ḥadīth also emphasize the individuality of a child daughter or son, and underline that they are full-fledged individuals, unique and full of potential. She/he has similar rights that Islam grants to an adult. It has been observed that some Muslim parents overlook the autonomy and sensitivities of their children as they enforce their thoughts, choices and outlook of life on their children. The present paper aims to highlight that Islam does not overlook individuality of a child and envisage counseling more than authoritarian parenting.

Key words: Parenting-Islam, Children, Parent-Child Relationship.

1. Introduction

In Islam, there is no distinction in the perception that a family is a fundamental social unit and the nucleus of the Muslim community. Family life traditions are so significant and long-lasting that they serve as the pillar of human society and its cradle. The family traditions are to be based on *The Holy Qur'an* and Sunnah and are passed down through the generations. For parents and growing children, Islam offers a stable, balanced and encouraging atmosphere. It is family life where human

relations and values such as devotion, kindness, humility and compassion are nurtured.

The parent-child relationship is the most significant one in a family. The relationship is interdependent and complementary. The rights of parents are the duties of the children and the rights of children are the duties of parents. This interdependence of rights and duties has been detailed by many Muslim scholars. However, the present article emphasizes that in Islam a child is considered as an individual and has right to choose, to think and speak. Also, parenting in Islam is counseling, logic, wisdom and consideration for the person of a child, and not an absolute authority. In our society however, this has been undermined.

2. Literature review

Books and articles have been published on the various aspects of parent-child rights and relationship. Aisha Utz and Aisha Hamdan (2009) explain the importance of instilling in our children a strong connection to their Creator and a love for the religion. Asma Ansari (2016) provides bite-size tips on different aspects of parenting through an Islamic perspective. Dr. Hisham Altalib (2013) has written an extensive guide to the fundamentals of parenting and child development. Highlighting the rights and duties of children and parents is a descriptive article by Dr. I. A. Arshed (2019). A parent-to-parent handbook outlining the challenges of parenting children from birth to pre-adolescence within an Islamic ethos in a pluralist society is a great attempt by Muhammad Abdul Bari (2015). Noha Alshugairi and Munira Lekovic Ezzeldine (2017) share timeless principles, describe 49 effective parenting tools, and guide through various parenting challenges. Parenting and guardianship rights are discussed in (Mudasra Sabreen, 2021).

Sarah Fritsche's (2021) article attempts to highlight what the Holy Qur'ān says about the religious responsibilities of the parent-child relationship. 'Ulawn Abdllah Nasih (2004) outlines the basic Islamic concepts in child education. Zillur Rahman (2019) essentially covers the rights of children before and after their birth; deviation of young minds and their remedies; imparting *tarbiyyah* with regard to creed, Islamic jurisdiction, manners, etiquettes, intellect and psychology. The brief literature review indicates that the previous studies focused on the rights and duties of the parent-child relationship. However, the present article primarily highlights that in parent-children relationship the individuality of

a child should never be undermined and that Islam does not envisage authoritarian parenting.

3. Importance of Children in Islam

Children are among the most precious of all the blessings with which Allah has bestowed human beings. *Wealth and children are embellishment of the worldly life*, says Allah Almighty. (*The Holy Qur'ān*, 18: 46) Children are *Amānah* or Trust from Allah Almighty. (*The Holy Qur'ān*, 66: 6) The purpose of maintaining that trust is to guide them in this world and after-life.

Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasulullah Khatam un Nabiyyin Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'ala Alihi wa Aṣḥabihi wa Ṣallam has told us that we are all responsible for our children. He (*Ṣal Allah-u-'alaihi wa sallam*) also said that even after our departure from this world, righteous children will remain for us as an ongoing charity (*sadaqa-i-jariyyah*).

(*Saḥīḥ Muslim* :1631)

4. The parent's relationship with children

It is obvious that after Allah Almighty parents are the persons who give us innumerable favours. They provide protection, food and clothing to the newly born. The mother sacrifices her comforts and sleep to provide comfort to her children. The father works hard to provide for their physical, educational and psychological (and spiritual) needs. So after Allah Almighty, our parents deserve our thanks and obedience for the favours they had done us. That's why *The Holy Qur'ān* lays stress on feeling grateful to parents, and doing good to them. *Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and do good to the parents*, (not compel them to bring their needs to your attention; but fulfill their requirements before they have to tell you, even though in reality they are not in need of your assistance); *if any one of them or both of them reach old age* (and become angry with you), *do not say to them: uff* (a word or expression of anger or contempt) *and* (if they beat you) *do not scold them, and address them with respectful words* (and respect, i.e. say to them, 'May Allah forgive you') *and submit yourself before them in humility out of compassion* (and whenever you look at them,

look with gentleness and kindness; do not raise your voice upon their voices, nor your hands above their hands; nor walk before them); *and say:*

My Lord, be merciful to them as they have brought me up in my childhood. (The Holy Qur'ān, 17:23-24)

This explanation covers all three rights of parents: to cheerfully bear the hardship inflicted by parents, to talk to them gently, and not to raise your hands and voice above theirs.

The parent-child relationship is shared. They are bound together by mutual obligations and reciprocal commitments. The parents are enjoined to satisfy their offspring's spiritual and religious urges in order to produce righteous men and women, to be a consolation for the eyes of their parents in both the present world and Hereafter. (*The Holy Qur'ān, 52:21*) Defending the children and all those who are weak and oppressed on earth is an obligation for the believers. (*The Holy Qur'ān, 4:75*) Fathers are to provide for basic material needs of the children. Finally, Islam is strongly sensitive to the crucial dependence of the child on the parents. Their decisive role in forming the child's personality is clearly recognised in Islam. In a very suggestive statement,

Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasulullah Khatam un Nabiyyin b allallahu 'alaihi wa 'ala Alihi wa Aṣḥabihi wa Ṣallam declared that every child is born into the true malleable nature of 'Fitrah' (i.e., the pure natural in-born, monotheistic belief in Allah Almighty), it is parents later on who make him into a Jew, Christian or pagan.

(Saḥīḥ Muslim: 6426)

5. Children's Rights

Children's rights when enumerated are numerous, but in the context of the present paper only the following are emphasized:

5.1. Tarbiyyah

A very comprehensive concept in Islam is *tarbiyyah*. *Tarbiyyah* is an Arabic word that linguistically means: increase, nurture, rear, growth,

or loftiness. It may be defined as “the ideal approach in developing human nature, both directly through a method of verbal or visual communication, or indirectly through providing a role model, according to a specific curriculum that employs certain means and mechanisms in order to facilitate positive change.” (Mimi Fitriana, 2018) Within an Islamic context, the ideal approach is that which Allah Almighty used to develop his prophets (*‘Alaihim As-Salām*). Allah Almighty said with regard to Prophet Moses (*‘Alaih As-Salām*)

and that you might be brought up under My eye.
(*The Holy Qur’ān*, 20:39)

It is as such *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasulullah Khatam un Nabīyyin Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘ala Alihi wa Aṣḥabihi wa Ṣallam* used to develop the Companions. The primary sources of the curriculum (*Sharī‘ah* or *minhāj*) are those mentioned in *The Holy Qur’ān*: “...For each of you we have made a law and a method (*Shir‘atan wa minhāja*)” (*The Holy Qur’ān*, 5:48) Ibn ‘Abbas said that *Sharī‘ah* is what was revealed in *The Holy Qur’ān* and *Minhāj* is what we learnt through the Sunnah.

Right *tarbiyyah* is the children’s right to their parents and guardians. *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasulullah Khatam un Nabīyyin Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘ala Alihi wa Aṣḥabihi wa Ṣallam* said,

“Command a boy to offer As-Salāth when he reaches the age of seven. And when he reaches the age of ten then, (if he does not offer As-Salāth) discipline him for it”
(*Sunan Abu Dawud*: 494)

5.2. Significance of Communication

Allah Almighty states in *The Holy Qur’ān* that Luqman used a greeting as he addressed his son, which is used in Arabic to express superlative form of love and affection (“*Bunayya*”—literally means “*O my little boy, O my baby etc.*” (*The Holy Qur’ān*, 31:12-13) The word could have been ‘*Ya ibni*’ (O my son), but while addressing his son, Luqman rendered *taṣghīr* (expression of affection) i.e. *ya bunayya*. Allah Almighty tells us that a solid foundation of love, affection, care and relationship is a pre-condition for successful communication and effective advice.

Similarly, Allah Almighty mentions more than once in *The Holy Qur'ān* the dialogue that Prophet Ibrahim (*'Alaih As-Salām*) had with his unbelieving father. (*The Holy Qur'ān*, 19: 41-50) This dialogue is regarded as a great expression of wisdom, civility, reverence, care and sacrifice.

In another reference, in his dream, the prophet Ibrahim (*'Alaih As-Salām*) saw that he was slaughtering his little son, Isma'el (*Alaih As-Salām*). *The Holy Qur'ān* mentions in Surah Al-Saffat

Thereafter, when he (the boy) reached an age in which he could work with him, he (Ibrahim) said, "O my little son, I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you, so consider, what is your opinion?" (The Holy Qur'ān, 37:102)

6. Kindness and leniency towards children

It is narrated by Abu Qatadah that:

"The Prophet (Ṣal Allah-u-'alaihi wa sallam) came out towards us, while carrying Umamah, the daughter of Abi Al-'As (his granddaughter) over his shoulder. He prayed, and when he wanted to bow, he put her down, and when he stood up, he lifted her up." (Saḥīḥ Bukhari: 5996).

In the same context, it is narrated by Abu Hurairah that:

"Allah's Messenger (Ṣal Allah-u-'alaihi wa sallam) kissed Al-Hasan bin 'Ali while Al-Aqra' bin Habis at-Tamim (Raḍi Allah 'Anhu) was sitting beside him. Al-Aqra' said, "I have ten children and I have never kissed anyone of them," Allah's Messenger (Ṣal Allah-u-'alaihi wa sallam) cast a look at him and said, "Whoever is not merciful to others will not be treated mercifully." (Saḥīḥ Bukhari: 5997)

He (*Ṣal Allah-u-'alaihi wa sallam*) often used to play with kids and talk to them about their personal affairs, even though they may seem unimportant to some individuals. 'The brother of Anas Ibn Malik (*Raḍi Allah 'anhu*), through his mother, was called Abu 'Umair and he had a bird who was called al-Nughair. The bird died and the child grieved for

it (and was really sad), and the Prophet (*Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam*) tried to cheer him up by saying:

“O Abu ‘Umair what happened to al-Nughair”.
(*Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhari: 6129*)

As such the Islamic method for the correction of children is that a mild, kind and soft-hearted approach should be used. (Khalid Dhorat, 1996)

7. A child’s honour and self-respect

When interacting with children, *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasulullah Khatam un Nabīyyin Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘ala Alihi wa Aṣḥabihi wa b-allam* was passionate about respecting their identities and selves, and willing to transmit to them the best of understanding in its simplest form. In addition, he does not reprimand them; a child tells us a related incident that occurred with *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasulullah Khatam un Nabīyyin b allallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘ala Alihi wa Aṣḥabihi wa Ṣallam*.

“This incident is about ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Amer, who says, “My mother called me one day when the Messenger of Allah (Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam) was sitting in our house, and she said: ‘Come here, I will give you something.’ The Messenger (Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam) said to her: ‘what did you want to give him?’ She said: I will give him some dates.’ The Messenger (Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam) said to her: ‘If you didn’t give him anything it would have been recorded against you as a lie.”
(*Sunan Abu Dawud: 4973*)

So he (*Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam*) warns her against lying or belittling the boy’s emotions.

Similarly ‘Umr Ibn Aby Salamah says,

“I was a little boy sitting on the lap of the Prophet (Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe wa sallam) and my hand was all over the plate, then the Messenger of Allah (Ṣal Allah-u-‘alaihe

wa sallam) said to me, "O boy, say 'Bismillah', eat with your right hand and eat from what is near you."

(Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhari: 5061)

Likewise,

'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar narrates that once, "We were with the Prophet (Ṣal Allah-u-'alaihi wa sallam), and a spadix of date-palm tree was brought to him. On that he said, "Amongst the trees, there is a tree which resembles a Muslim." I wanted to say that it was a date-palm tree but as I was the youngest of all (of them), I kept quiet. And then the Prophet (ṣal Allah-u-'alaihi wa sallam) said: "it is the date-palm tree" (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhari: 72)

He (Ṣal Allah-u-'alaihi wa sallam) also taught 'Abdullah Ibn 'Abbas by simple words, when he was riding behind him on his mount, great meanings:

"Oh boy, I will teach you these words; stay true to Allah (S.W.T.) (by keeping his commands), and He (S.W.T.) will protect you, stay true to Allah (S.W.T.), and He (S.W.T.) will stand by you.....etc." (Sunan Tirmidhi: 2516)

These *Sūrah* references indicate that parenting is not about authority, it is more about counseling. Children are not supposed to be treated as kids only. It is important to value their sensibilities, attitudes and choices. Children seem to like the one who is easy with them and treat them as if he is one of them; on the other hand, they are repelled from the rough, angry and frowning guy, alert with a serious humble one. The mentality of the era was understood by *Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasulullah Khatam un Nabīyyin Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'ala Alihi wa Aṣḥabihi wa Ṣallam* and he treated them the way they liked to be treated. By his simplicity, amusement and compassion and significant meanings in disciplining and teaching he tried to behave their personalities.

8. The Parent-Children relationship is reciprocal

Parental care and instruction are central to child upbringing. The

parent's right to love from their children is based upon the children's right to loving care and guidance of their parents. This can be understood in the depth of the meaning of the verse of *The Holy Qur'ān*:

“And submit yourself before them in humility out of compassion, and say, “My Lord, be merciful to them as they have brought me up in my childhood”,

(The Holy Qur'ān 17: 24)

which illustrates the parental duty and care towards the children at their tender ages and after, towards which the children are asked to pray to Allah Almighty for their parents as a reciprocal way-*[when I was small]*, thus it comes to light that the relationship between parent and children is shared. Generally, parent's rights over children are emphasized a lot although the children's rights over their parents are usually neglected particularly in the societies of the subcontinent. (Dr. N. M. Ahmed Ibrahim 2016, 72)

9. Discussion

In the subcontinent, there is a tendency to be authoritative at the cost of children's wishes and requests. Some Muslim parents in the name of religion undermine the individuality and the right to choice of a child. The children's interest in a particular profession, their different food likings, clothing, and diverse approach to life are considered un-Islamic if not anti-Islamic. Islam gives a great deal of responsibility to parents for raising their kids. Let's note that it is parents in Islam who deserve their children's honourable treatment. As such, parents are made more accountable and more responsible. That is why, once a man came to Ḥaḍrat 'Umar (*Raḍi Allah 'anhu*) complaining of his son's disobedience to him. Ḥaḍrat 'Umar (*Raḍi Allah 'anhu*) summoned the boy and questioned him of his disobedience to his father. The boy replied “*O Amīr al-Mu'minīn!*, does not a child have rights over his father?”. Definitely, replied the *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*. When the boy enquired about those rights, Ḥaḍrat 'Umar (*Raḍi Allah 'anhu*) replied, ‘they are that a father should choose a good mother for him, give him a good name and teach him the Qur'ān’. ‘My father did nothing of this’, replied the son; ‘My mother is a Magian: fire-worshipper. He named me Ju‘alan (meaning dung beetle) and he did not teach a single letter of the Qur'ān’. Turning

to his father, Ḥaḍrat ‘Umar (*Raḍi Allah ‘anhu*) said, ‘You had come to me to complain about the disobedience of your son, but you have failed in your duty towards him before he has failed in his duty towards you; you have wronged him before he has wronged you’. (A. M. As-Sallabi, 2007) Here lies a clear message for both, one, emphasizing the parental responsibility and second, child’s right to seek genuine answers. As far as the overall personality development of a child is concerned it is imperative to bridge the gap in the parent-child relationship. This can be achieved by giving importance to children, recognize them as equals in the family and share with them the family wellbeing. They should be frequently praised, as praise is endearing to children. They should not be shamed in any situation as it dissolves their self-confidence. It is also good to dine with them, answer their queries in an honest way and embrace them frequently. Admit your mistakes immediately and honestly before children. Respect their ideas and want, if reasonable lovingly oblige. (Ahamad Faosiy Ogunbado, 2016)

10. Conclusion

Islam recognises each child as complete, special and unique, and that uniqueness is to be cherished, promoted and blossomed. Islam does not expect us to produce clone copies as parents, rather water each child to flourish in the field and profession of her/his choice-be it the profession of medicine, engineering, entrepreneurship, social work, lawyer, businessperson, *dā‘ī* (preacher), writer, scientists so on and so forth. In fact under Islamic law the right to belief, thinking and to express one’s opinion is among the key human rights. The right to speech is inseparable from the right to believe and think. Though Islam has explicitly identified the rights of parents and children however they never overlap nor are at the expense of one another. None has to give up his/her individuality to flourish, blossom and develop his personality.

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