

Chapter 5

The Muslim and His Children

Introduction

Children are the apple of a man's eye, the source of great joy and companionship. They make life sweet and, after Allāh (ﷻ), they are the ones on whom he pins his hopes. Their blessing brings *rizq*, mercy and an abundance of reward.

But this depends on the children having a good, solid upbringing, which will make them respectful, kind, and a source of happiness. If a man's children have these good attributes then they will truly be joys of this life, as Allāh (ﷻ) described them in the Qur'ān:

﴿Wealth and sons are allurements [joys] of the life of this world . . .﴾ (Qur'ān 18:46)

For this reason the Prophet (ﷺ) used to pray for those whom he loved, that Allāh (ﷻ) would grant them wealth and children in abundance. Anas (رضي الله عنه) reported that he entered upon the Prophet (ﷺ) with his mother and maternal aunt. The Prophet (ﷺ) led them in prayer, then he prayed (made *du'ā'*) for them. Umm Anas said, "O Messenger of Allāh, your little servant, pray for him." So the Prophet (ﷺ) prayed for him, and at the end of his *du'ā'* said: "O Allāh (ﷻ), grant him wealth and children in abundance, and bless him." (Bukhārī and Muslim)

But if the parents neglect their children's upbringing, the results will be disastrous. Their children will be a source of annoyance, frustration and constant concern, not to mention nights of lost sleep and days of worry.

He understands his great responsibility towards his children

The true Muslim understands his great responsibility towards the children he has brought into this world, as the Qur'ān tells him:

﴿O you who believe! Save yourselves and your family from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones . . .﴾ (Qur'ān 66:6)

He also appreciates the responsibility that the Prophet (ﷺ) has placed upon him:

"Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock. The leader is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock; a man is the shepherd of his family and is responsible for his flock; a woman is the shepherd in the house of her husband and is responsible for her flock; the servant is the shepherd of his master's wealth and is responsible for it. Each of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock."

Islām has placed a burden of responsibility on the shoulders of all people, from which none may be excused. Above all, parents are responsible for providing their children with a sound Islāmic education and upbringing, based on the noble characteristics which the Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned that he had been sent to complete and spread among people:

“I have only been sent to make righteous behaviour complete.”¹

There is no greater proof of the gravity of parents’ responsibility to bring their children up to obey Allāh (ﷻ) and His Messenger, than the verdict of the ‘*ulamā*’ that every family should heed the words of the Prophet (ﷺ):

“Instruct your children to pray when they are seven years of age, and hit them if they do not pray when they are ten.”²

Every family which is aware of this ḥadīth but the parents do not teach their children to pray when they reach seven or hit them if they do not do so when they reach ten, is a family that is failing in its duty and neglecting its children. These parents are sinners who are responsible before Allāh (ﷻ) for this failure and neglect.

The home is the first environment in which these little ones grow: it is the milieu in which their inclinations, attitudes and personalities are formed. This explains the importance of the parents’ role in nurturing their young ones and paying equal attention to their physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

He uses the best methods in bringing them up

The true Muslim parent — whether father or mother — understands the psychology of his or her children and knows how to deal with them, using the best and most effective methods of parenting and upbringing. He endears himself to them in all kinds of ways, and gets close to them, according to their age and mental levels, so he plays with them, praises them, jokes with them and tells them words of love and care which make them happy. Then they will love him, and accept his direction eagerly. When they obey him, it will be from the heart, for there is a great difference between the obedience which is based on love, respect and trust, and that which is based on violence and cruelty. The former is lasting obedience, while the latter is shallow and baseless, and will quickly vanish when the violence and cruelty reach extreme levels.

Some people think that if the father comes down to his children’s level and interacts closely with them, this will diminish his paternal status in their eyes and undermine his parenting efforts. Nothing could be further from the truth, for this kind of approach is the most efficient method of raising children properly,

¹ Reported by Bukhārī in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, Imām Mālik in *al-Muwattā’*, and Imām Aḥmad in *al-Musnad*.

² Reported by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and al-Ḥākim. Its *isnād* is *ḥasan*.

and is promoted by modern experts. It is also the method promoted by the Prophet (ﷺ) fifteen hundred years ago, and clearly demonstrated by him in word and deed.

The Prophet (ﷺ) used to line up ‘Abdullah, ‘Ubaydullah and Kuthayyir, the sons of al-‘Abbās (رضي الله عنه) and say: “Whoever reaches me first, I will give him such-and-such.” So they would race towards him and jump on his back and chest, kissing him.¹

Bukhārī, in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, and al-Ṭabarānī reported from Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet (ﷺ) took the hand of al-Ḥasan (رضي الله عنه) or al-Ḥusayn (رضي الله عنه), then put his feet on his foot and said, “Climb up.”

There is no clearer demonstration of the spirit of the great educator than in the way he carried al-Ḥasan (رضي الله عنه) and al-Ḥusayn (رضي الله عنه), and treated them with love and care, thus setting an example for fathers and grandfathers everywhere, no matter how great their status and influence, to treat these tender young shoots in the most gentle and caring way. This may be seen in the ḥadīth narrated by Aḥmad and al-Nisā’ī from Shaddād:

“The Prophet (ﷺ) went out carrying al-Ḥasan or al-Ḥusayn, and when he came forward to lead the prayer, he put the child down and commenced the prayer. He prostrated himself and stayed in that position for a long time. I raised my head and saw the child on his back, so I returned to my prostration. When he had finished praying, the people said, ‘O Messenger of Allāh, you prostrated for such a long time.’ He said, ‘My child was riding on my back, and I did not like to disturb him until he had had enough.’”²

The Muslim should be in the habit of being involved with his children, treating them with love and kindness and joking with them, as much as he can whenever he finds the opportunity, so that their hearts will be filled with happiness.

He demonstrates his love and affection for them

One of his primary paternal duties is to demonstrate his love, mercy and affection towards his children so that they will grow up confident, positive, optimistic and with high levels of self-esteem.

Compassion is a basic Islāmic characteristic, and was one of the most prominent characteristics of the Prophet (ﷺ), as Anas (رضي الله عنه) told us:

“I never saw anyone who was more compassionate towards children than the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ). His son Ibrāhīm was in the care of a wet-nurse in the hills around Madīnah. He would go there, and we would go with him, and he would enter the house, pick up his son and kiss him, then come back.” (Muslim)

¹ Reported by Aḥmad. Al-Ḥāfīz said in *al-Tahdhīb* (8/421) that its *isnād* is *mursal jayyid*.

² Reported by Aḥmad and al-Nisā’ī with a *ṣaḥīḥ isnād*.

The Prophet's mercy and love towards the Muslim children included little ones at play. Anas (رضي الله عنه) reports that whenever the Prophet (ﷺ) passed by a group of boys he would smile fondly and greet them. (Bukhārī and Muslim)

An example of his enduring educational wisdom is the advice:

"He is not one of us who does not show compassion to our little ones and recognize the rights of our elders." ¹

Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) said:

"The Prophet (ﷺ) kissed al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī, and al-Aqra' ibn Ḥābis said: 'I have ten children, and I have never kissed any of them.' The Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'He who does not show mercy will not be shown mercy.'" (Bukhārī and Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ), this great educator, always sought to instill the quality of mercy and compassion in people's hearts, and to awaken their potential for love and affection, which are the most basic of human characteristics.

One day a Bedouin came and asked the Prophet (ﷺ), "Do you kiss your sons? We do not." The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "What can I do for you if Allāh (ﷻ) has removed mercy from your heart?" (Bukhārī and Muslim)

'Ā'ishah (رضي الله عنها) reports:

"Whenever Fāṭimah came into the room, the Prophet (ﷺ) would stand up, welcome her, kiss her and offer her his seat, and whenever he came into the room, she would stand up, take his hand, welcome him, kiss him and offer him her seat. When she came to see him during his final illness, he welcomed her and kissed her." (Bukhārī and Muslim)

In the light of this guidance, the true Muslim cannot be stern towards his children and treat them in a rough or mean fashion, even if it is his nature to be grim and reserved, because this religion, with its enlightenment and guidance, softens hearts and awakens feelings of love and affection. So children are a part of us, going forth into the world, as the poet said:

"Our children are our hearts, walking among us on the face of the earth, / if even a little breeze touches them, we cannot sleep for worrying about them." ²

Parents should be filled with love, affection and care, and willing to make sacrifices and do their best for their children.

¹ Reported by Aḥmad and al-Ḥākim. Its *isnād* is *ṣaḥīḥ*.

² These lines by the poet Hittān al-Mu'allī are to be found in *Sharḥ al-Ḥamāsah* by al-Tabrīzī, 1/275.

He spends on them, willingly and generously

Islām does not rely only on the parents' natural instincts to care for their children, because sometimes parents may be reluctant to give up some of life's pleasures for the sake of their children, or else hard times and poverty may cause parents to complain about the heavy burden of expenses. So Islām reinforces the parents' natural instincts to care for their children by promising them a great reward, which encourages them to make sacrifices and helps them to bear their poverty.

Umm Salamah said:

"I said, 'O Messenger of Allāh, will I be rewarded for what I spend on the children of Salamah? I am not going to abandon them in any case, for they are my children too.' He said, 'Yes, you will be rewarded for what you spend on them.'" (Bukhārī and Muslim)

Abū Mas'ūd al-Badrī (رضي الله عنه) said:

"The Prophet (ﷺ) said: 'When a man spends on his family with the intention of pleasing Allāh (ﷻ), then it will be counted as ṣadaqah (charity) on his part.'" (Bukhārī and Muslim)

Islām considers spending on one's wife and children to be one of the best kinds of spending, one of the deeds which will bring the greatest rewards. This is borne out by the ḥadīth which Muslim reported from Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه), who said:

"The Prophet (ﷺ) said: 'Money you spend for the sake of Allāh (ﷻ), money you spend to free a slave, money you give in charity to the poor, and money you spend on your family . . . The greatest in reward of all of these is spending on your family.'" (Bukhārī and Muslim)

In another report, narrated by Muslim, the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

"The best money a man can spend is money he spends on his children, money he spends on his mount for the purpose of jihād, and money he spends on his friends for the sake of Allāh (ﷻ)."

The true Muslim is happy to spend on his family, because he is certain that whatever he spends on them and others, with the intention of pleasing Allāh (ﷻ), will bring him reward, even the morsel of food which he may raise to his wife's mouth in a light-hearted gesture of affection. This is clear from the ḥadīth narrated by Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (رضي الله عنه), that the Prophet (ﷺ) told him:

"You will never spend anything for the sake of Allāh (ﷻ) without there being a reward for it, even the food which you put in your wife's mouth." (Bukhārī and Muslim)

The true Muslim cannot abandon his children and leave them in poverty and misery, when he hears the words of the Prophet (ﷺ) threatening men who neglect their responsibilities towards their families and warning them of the worst punishment and torment in the Hereafter:

"It is sin enough for a man to forsake those who are under his care." (Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, *et al*)

He does not discriminate between sons and daughters in his affection and spending

Some people are disappointed to have daughters, and wish that Allāh (ﷻ) had given them only sons. They do not know of the great reward which Allāh (ﷻ) has promised to the father who has been given daughters, and accepts them, takes care of them, gives them a good upbringing, and showers love and affection upon them. If they knew the reward that awaits the caring, merciful father of girls, they would feel jealous of him and would want that for themselves too.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

“Whoever has three daughters, and is patient with them, gives them food and drink, and clothes them from his earnings, they will be for him a shield against the Fire of the Day of Resurrection.”¹

In another report, he (ﷺ) said:

“Whoever has three daughters and shelters them, provides what they need and shows compassion towards them, will certainly deserve Paradise.” A man among the people asked, “And if they are two, O Messenger of Allāh?” And he said, “Yes, even if they are two.”

How could any man resent bringing up daughters and spending on them when he hears of the rewards and blessings that Allāh (ﷻ) has promised him?

Islām, this practical religion which recognizes the realities of people’s lives in all times and places, recognizes the fact that a daughter may get divorced and return to her father’s house, and that her father may be in straitened circumstances with a low income or many other children to care for, so it offers him the comfort that will soothe his troubled spirit and ease his stress. Islām tells this father that whatever he spends on his daughter who has come home to him is one of the greatest acts of charity and one of the deeds that will bring him closest to Allāh (ﷻ).

The Prophet (ﷺ) said to Surāqah ibn Ju’sham: “Shall I not tell you about the greatest form of charity?” He said, “Of course, O Messenger of Allāh.” He said, “Your daughter who has come back to you and has no other breadwinner.”²

What comparison can there be between the great affection and love with which children in the Muslim world are nurtured, and the harsh life suffered by children in the West, where when a child, boy or girl, who has barely reached the age of eighteen, leaves the family home to face the stark realities of life and to struggle to earn a living before he is ready to or before he has had enough love and support from his family? There is a huge difference between the laws of Allāh (ﷻ), which bring happiness to mankind, and the inadequate laws of man which only cause suffering. Not surprisingly, in western countries, as a result of these materialistic laws, there are armies of promiscuous young men and hordes of unfortunate young unmarried mothers, and their numbers are increasing daily.

¹ Narrated by Aḥmad in *al-Musnad*, with a *ṣaḥīḥ isnād*.

² Reported by Bukhārī in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*.

He is alert to everything that may have an influence on them

The smart Muslim father keeps his eyes open as far as his children are concerned. He knows what they are reading and writing, the hobbies they have chosen or which he may have encouraged them to follow, without them realizing it, the friends with whom they spend most of their time, and the places they go in their spare time. He knows all of this without his children feeling that he is watching them. If he finds anything objectionable in their reading-material or hobbies, or finds that they are hanging around with undesirable friends, or going to unsuitable places, or taking up bad habits like smoking, or wasting time and energy on *ḥarām* games that make them accustomed to trivialities and idle pursuits, he puts them straight in a gentle and wise manner, and persuades them to return to the straight and narrow.

Every new baby is born in a state of *fiṭrah* (the natural state of man), and it is parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian, as is mentioned in the *ṣaḥīḥ* ḥadīth narrated by Bukhārī. Hence the parents' responsibility regarding the upbringing of the child and the formation of his personality is clear.

The books which children spend time reading should be broadening their minds, building their personalities and offering them good examples; they should not be corrupting them and extinguishing the flame of goodness in their hearts.

Hobbies should nurture the positive aspects of the children and instill in them good taste, not encourage them to follow falsehood. Their friends should be of the type who will keep them on the Straight Path and lead them to Paradise, not those who will corrupt them and lead them to Hell. How many people have been brought to the slippery slope of destruction and perdition by their friends, when their fathers were unaware of what was happening to their own children! How wise are the words of the poet 'Adiyy ibn Zayd al-'Abādī concerning friends:

"If you are among people, then make friends with the best of them./

Do not make friends with the worst of them lest you become as bad as he is./

Do not ask about the man, but ask about his friend, for every person is influenced by his friends."¹

The true Muslim father takes notice of his children's books, magazines, hobbies, school, teachers, clubs, media interests, and everything that may have an impact on their personalities, minds, souls and faith. He should intervene when necessary, either to encourage or to put a stop to something, so that the children's upbringing will not be affected by corruption or sickness.

Hence we can explain the success of some families in raising their children, and the failure of others. The former feel responsible towards their children and take care of them properly, so the children become good for the family and the community at large; the latter do not feel this responsibility, so they neglect their children, and the children become bad for their family and the community at large, a source of distress in their life and after death. Allāh (ﷻ) has spoken the truth:

﴿. . . Truly, among your wives and your children are [some that are] enemies to yourselves, so beware of them! . . .﴾ (Qur'ān 64:14)

¹ *Dīwān 'Adiyy*, p. 107.

Children would not have turned against their parents if their parents had kept to the right path, recognized their responsibilities towards their children and done their duty as they should.

He equally treats all his children

One of the elements of wise upbringing is for the parents to treat all their children equally, and not to favour one of them over the others in any way. The child who feels that he is treated fairly and that he and his brothers are equal, will grow up with a healthy self-esteem, free from feelings of inferiority; he will not hate his brother, or eat his heart out with jealousy, but will be content, tolerant, kind and caring towards others. This is what Islām encourages and orders parents to do.

Bukhārī and Muslim narrated from al-Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr (رضي الله عنه):

“My father brought me to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said, ‘I have given this son of mine a slave I have.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) asked him, ‘Have you given each of your children the same?’ He said, ‘No,’ so the Prophet (ﷺ) told him: ‘Then take the slave back.’”

According to another report Nu‘mān said:

“The Prophet (ﷺ) asked, ‘Have you done the same for all your children?’ (My father) said, ‘No,’ so the Prophet (ﷺ) said, ‘Fear Allāh (ﷻ) and treat all of your children equally.’ So my father went and took back his gift.”

According to a third report:

“The Prophet (ﷺ) asked, ‘O Bishr, do you have any other children?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) asked, ‘Will you give a similar gift to each of them?’ He said, ‘No.’ So the Prophet (ﷺ) said, ‘Do not ask me to witness this, because I do not want to witness unfairness.’ Then he added, ‘Would you not like all of your children to treat you with equal respect?’ [Bishr] said, ‘Of course.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) told him: ‘So do not do it.’” (Bukhārī and Muslim)

Therefore the Muslim who fears Allāh (ﷻ) treats all his children with equal fairness, and does not favour one above the other in giving gifts, spending money on him or in the way he treats him. So all of them will pray for him, love him and treat him with kindness and respect.

He instills good behaviour and attitudes in them

When children’s hearts are thus filled with contentment and goodness, the father can then raise them up to the level of high morals and noble human virtues. So he instills in them good manners such as caring for others, helping the weak, being kind to relatives, respecting elders, being merciful to the young, cheerfully doing good and striving to spread justice among people. A person cannot give that which he

does not have. The man was right who said, “Righteousness comes from Allāh (ﷻ) and good manners come from parents.”¹

The smart Muslim father understands his children’s psychology and knows how to instill wisdom and good attitudes in them, using the best methods of parenting in order to do so, such as setting a good example, coming down to their level, treating them well, and cheerfully showing mercy, humility, love, interest, encouragement, fairness, advice, correction and guidance. He is lenient towards them without being weak, and is strict without being cruel. Thus the children will grow up in an atmosphere of care, compassion and affection, that can only produce caring, kind, loyal and righteous children whose personalities are strong, who are willing to give and to shoulder their responsibilities. This is the norm for families who raise their children on Islāmic principles and the teachings of the Qur’ān:

﴿. . . [We take our] colour from Allāh, and who is better than Allāh at colouring ? . . .﴾ (Qur’ān 2:138 — Pickthall’s translation)

¹ Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 92.