

Mother as a Child's First and Finest Teacher: Nurturing Mind and Heart

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Abstract: It is Islam alone which granted an exalted status to mother. The Hadith is well-known: "Jannah is under the feet of the mother". The Hadith however does not mean that all mothers will go to Jannah. In this sense, as long as it is not contrary to the commands of Allah, it is an important key to Jannah to obey all mothers, to show respect to them; and in this sense, Jannah is under the feet of all mothers. Besides the esoteric meaning of the Hadith, several apparent examples are available in the Sirah Literature with regard to respecting mothers. The love of a mother is a symbol of Rahmah of Allah on Earth. It is the mother who takes care of and fulfils all of her child's needs. A mother creates a permanent impression on her child regarding leading life with her Talim, and this is the reason why she is considered as the best teacher. The mother is an architect of the child's future since she builds her child's self-confidence, character and manners. In fact, the mother is a teacher who builds the foundation of a better society through her teachings. Motherhood is one of the most vital institutions in society, serving as the foundation for the moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth of future generations. In Islam, mothers hold a unique position as the primary nurturers and educators of children. Their influence in shaping a child's faith, conduct, and worldview is unmatched. This paper explores the responsibilities of mothers as the finest teachers, the importance of moral and religious training (Talim and Tarbiyyah), and the role of healthy activities in personality development. It also highlights the significance of modesty, vigilance in monitoring children's activities, and the transmission of Islamic values and cultural heritage. Drawing from Qur'anic injunctions, Hadith, and examples from the lives of the pious women of Islam, this study emphasizes that mothers are entrusted with the Amanah (trust) of raising righteous children who will contribute positively to society and safeguard the future of Islam.

Keywords: Motherhood, Islamic upbringing, Talim, Tarbiyyah, child development, modesty, parenting in Islam, Islamic education

1. A Mother is the Finest Teacher:

The mother should be an ideal example for her child and if she wants her child to be a healthy Muslim in society, she must first herself acquire the Talim of Islam. A pious and virtuous mother is a gift to a family. She is a shining example for her offspring. Due to her constant contact with her children, she is best positioned to teach them. Children observe and practice the conduct of their parents, especially their mothers. Therefore, the mother should be careful about her conduct and actions. Her negligence in delivering religious Talim could become the cause of her child's destruction. This is why the behavior of the mother with her child should be like a close friend so that they easily accept and imbibe all that the mother teaches and has to offer. Nowadays moral Talim is needed more so than ever. It requires a healthy spirit, awareness, piety, chastity, honour, affection and etiquettes. Even if she has all these qualities, she may not be called a mother unless she acts accordingly and contributes towards the development of her children to the best of her ability.

A Hadith says:

"Every child is born on the Fitrah (nature) of Islam, but his/her parents make him/her a Jew, Christian, or irreligious."

Parents should know that their child, when born, is pure and innocent. This is why they should be especially careful in how they deal with them. In other words, a child is akin to gold and only a skilled goldsmith is able to mould this valuable metal. Children, after a few years, will be masters of their own families and society, and it is time that we must realize what kind of masters we want!

2. Responsibilities of a Mother:

The duty of mothers is not confined to just providing food and clothes for their offspring. A much more important responsibility is to handle their children with kindness, love and affection. Otherwise, they would face several problems. No doubt, the lap of a mother is the first training center for a child, who learns morality and religion from her. This is a very serious responsibility. It is only the mother who can provide to society a healthy and useful person. Punctuality in the observance of religious obligations and affairs also draws the attention of the children and they get inclined to follow it. Speak the truth and maintain equality among children to develop their habits unconsciously. It is unfortunate that some mothers spend time with their children in totally unproductive activities. Fictional stories and mythological tales are not recommended. Mothers should encourage children to read the biographies of the great personalities of Islam. Inform them about important religious events and warn them about the consequences of disobedience to Allah frequently. It will help them to build their lives in the Duniya and prepare their A'akhirah. Undoubtedly, the above-mentioned matters can only be taught to children when they are interested and attracted towards them.

The best way to create interest in children is through the mother who can teach these matters through various activities. If the father is the fountain of protection, the roses of affection are easily available in the lap of the mother. Mother is the name of that peerless training institution where both saintly, as well as ill habits, are nurtured. Islam presents an ideal institution of motherhood, from which every mother can learn. Yes, this is the institution of Umm al-

Mumineen, Sayyidah Khudaijah (as), who trained her daughter Sayyidah Fatimah (as) in a manner that she personified ideal motherhood, and who in turn prepared her children in the same fashion. Besides Al Imam al-Hasan (as) and Al Imam al-Husain (as), her daughters Sayyidah Zaynab (as) and Sayyidah Umm'e-Kulthum's (as) contribution ensured the perpetual safety of Islam. It was the outcome of the Talim and Tarbiyyah of their mother Fatimah (as) that they fixed their glorious imprint on the history of Islam. When we hear these pious names we become sentimental due to the great reverence that we hold for them but unfortunately we don't practice their teachings. We have forsaken our values, culture and civilization for the blind love of the western civilization. Parents who are unfamiliar with Islamic teachings are unconcerned with the Talim and Tarbiyyah of their children. They assume that it is the responsibility of the maids, governesses or school-teachers. This responsibility appears quite insignificant to many modern women in view of their so-called social activities.

3. Healthy activities:

Encouraging playing sports is a part of Tarbiyyah which is necessary during childhood and perhaps this is why many children naturally take more interest in extra-curricular activities. Appropriate games make the child happy and a game without any movement or struggle is not good or beneficial. One of the ways to develop personality in children is through participation of parents in their games. When parents take part in such activities, the self-confidence of their children naturally develops. To make a child happy is a kind of 'ibadah. Rasulallah (S) says: "One who has a child should behave like a child in Tarbiyyah (training)".

4. Don't ignore your daughter's dressing:

Today we observe that mothers or grand-mothers are modestly dressed and are often seen in Rida or Hij'ab while their daughters or grand-daughters wear immodest clothes. This changing social scenario makes us ponder how and why these parents ignore the Talim of the Qur'an and Saheb al-Qur'an? Isn't it surprising that such parents while knowing the values of Islam allow their girls to wear ultra-modern dresses? This is a great problem which is being faced by the Muslim world. The mother or grandmother is responsible for not reprimanding and teaching her daughter the values of dressing modestly. They will face the La'anah and Az'ab in this world as well as in the A'akhirah.

We need to change our own lives first and work on a vision for the future. A man is the guardian over his family and shall be questioned about them (as to how he looked after their physical and moral well-being). A woman on the other hand is a guardian over her husband and his children and shall be questioned about them (as to how she managed the household and brought up the children). Our children are our best investment for the future of Islam. As Muslims, we need to start taking this Amanah (trust) seriously and take responsibility through our actions.

5. Things to hand over to your child:

- i. Knowledge of and love for Allah and religion. This is one of the most precious and enduring gifts you can pass down to your children. It will benefit them in their life and the hereafter.
- ii. No matter how little you have memorized the Qur'an yourself, encourage your child to memorize as much as possible. Persuade and help them in revising the Surahs and Duas. It will allow them to have a good source of guidance in their life.
- iii. A sense of self-worth and self-esteem should be promoted. Make them feel secure in their identity and show appreciation. This will have a positive impact on their future relationships and how they interact with the world.
- iv. Try to teach Arabic, the language of the Qur'an to your child, a key to understanding the Qur'an. Also, if you have a mother-tongue or speak a second language yourself, pass it on: a second or third language is always an asset, be it in an academic or social environment.
- v. Instill good housekeeping habits in your children and encourage them to take pride in a neat and tidy home.
- vi. A sense of modesty should be developed in the child.
- vii. If you are a keen gardener, knitter or love painting or whatever it is that you like doing, pass these skills onto your children. With so many "traditional skills" being lost in today's fast world, you owe it to them to pass on these skills so that they in turn can be transferred to the next generations.
- viii. Teach your children how to cook. Try to teach them your traditional recipes to ensure that they are passed down to the future generations.
- ix. Inculcate in your children a love for their roots and heritage by sharing your family background. Hopefully, the child will do the same with the next generation, In sha Allah.

6. Vigilantly observe the activities of your children:

There is a serious need for at least one of the parent to be the child's friend, especially while living in the west. Friendship is to have a kind of relationship with the children where parents discuss issues with them that are usually avoided. This attitude develops confidence in the children and they will approach their parents comfortably with questions. Normally it is the mother who steps in to the role of a friend as her approach is friendlier than the father's. However, when children cross limits of respect, it is advised that the recognition of "authority" must also be established.

The mother should consider the following points:

1. The tone of the voice must not be harsh
2. Volume should remain under control
3. Words must be polite and respectful

Parents who are not religiously strict later on face severe problems. Children are influenced by a wider range of factors other than the condition of their immediate family, friends and close community. It has always been hard to raise good kids, regardless of time and place. These days children mostly spend time on television, computers, cell-phones and video-games which is destructive. It is better if parents fix programs of TV for the children and have a password on the computer as well as not allow them to use cell phones until a certain age. Parents should review

the literature which the children have access to, other than the syllabus, just to make sure it doesn't contain anything inappropriate.

This observation provides benefits to the child later on. Younger children will complain now of the strictness of parents, but in sha Allah one day, they will see how it has nurtured them into better people. I remember my paternal grandmother being very strict about our daily Salaat, may Allah shower His Rahmah upon her.

Respect for parents is not taught in schools, but in Madaris. Respecting the parents is considered to be a praiseworthy quality in eastern society, unlike the west. Perhaps due to this, parents in the west get away with a "formal" relationship with their children, but in the east it doesn't seem like the best option. Unfortunately in the east, due to the cultural invasion of the west, we can see in the TV programs children talking to parents in a disrespectful manner, addressing them in an angry, loud and harsh tone, assuming it to be normal. Some programs even make fun of the parents which is shown as "comedy," especially the programs geared towards teenagers.

Discuss things with your children in a manner that they feel comfortable, and answer the questions which they have. You will see that your child will grow close to you, in sha Allah. Judge the situation and act accordingly. If the child is very young and doesn't ask directly, then there may be no need to bring up any sensitive issue. However, if a child is curious and his/her friends know about it (and especially if they go to school), then you might want to bring it up yourself and explain before they ask.

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