

Talim, Iman, and Akhlaq: The Role of Purposeful Parenting in Early Childhood Development

By: Qazi Dr. Shaikh Abbas Borhany al-Waleed

PhD (USA), NDI, Shahadat al-Aalamiyyah (Al-Hawzah, Najaf, Iraq), M.A, LLM (Shariah)

Musheer: Fed. Shariat Court of Pakistan

Member: Ulama Council of Pakistan

Chairman: The Guardian Pakistan

The Writer is an Attorney at Law and a Religious Scholar

Website: www.durrenajaf.com

Academia: <https://durrenajaf.academia.edu/QaziBorhany>

Contact for spiritual help: najafspiritualcenter@gmail.com

Published: 2010, Pakistan Times, The Weekly Mag, Daily News

Revised: 2026

Abstract: Home is foremost Madrasah of a child which plays an important role to build personality. Therefore early childhood is the most important period one's of life, special attention needs to be paid to the Tarbiyyah. The most significant objective desired for children is to instill an awe and wonder of the natural world in the young minds. This is specifically the time when our young generation is in search of their roots, and they have a wish and potential both to revise our lost intellectual tradition in the history of the eight-hundred-year long Islamic scientific tradition -in a manner that is not filled with emotional nostalgia, but is built on solid content-can open many vistas for the young minds. The concept of Talim is often misunderstood as merely caretaking, grooming, or fulfilling the nutritional and healthcare needs of children. In reality, Talim encompasses a broader, multidimensional process that integrates spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, and ethical education. This paper explores the true meaning of Talim, emphasizing its role in nurturing children into responsible, well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to society. Drawing from Islamic teachings, sayings of Imams, and modern-day parenting observations, the study highlights the consequences of neglecting proper Talim and Tarbiyyah, the dangers of overindulgence, and the urgent need for balanced upbringing. The work concludes with actionable recommendations for parents and educators to fulfill their responsibilities effectively in shaping future generations.

Keywords: Talim, Tarbiyyah, Islamic education, child development, parenting, values, upbringing, morality, spiritual training, modern challenges

1. What is the meaning of Talim?

Do you know that mere supervision, grooming, and fulfilling the nutritional and healthcare needs of children is not Talim, but just caretaking. Talim instead is a collective term encompassing the following five dimensions:

- i. Teaching Aqaid, principles of religion, values, upright thinking, mindfulness, and awareness of life.
- ii. Constant improvement and refinement in various necessary skills and application like physical exercise, technical proficiency, mental ability, social, administrative, and academic skills, and manners.

iii. Teaching etiquette; who to meet? Who not to meet? Additionally, teaching about emotional well-being.

iv. A role model is not only successful in his personal life but has also greatly contributed to the progress and well-being of society, and striving to inculcate those values and habits is equally important.

Children are like soft, moldable clay who can be shaped any which way, and this is a process that starts in early childhood. Therefore, Talim about religion and Tarbiyyah of practice should begin as early as possible, most likely from 3 to 4 years. If children are taught the Aqaid of Islam and are accustomed to performing them, they will attain religious and worldly happiness side by side. If they are not taught and trained, they will be entangled in the web of sins and crimes. Qur'an says: [1]

"Protect yourselves and those in your homes and under your command from the fire!"

It is most important for a father to protect his children from an unhealthy atmosphere and keep an eye on their circle of friends as it is said that the source of all kinds of immoral deeds is an evil friend. A child is not an object of satisfaction or a toy of enjoyment for the parents but a living being. The child also does not remain a child forever but one day is expected to become an active member of society. This is why it is imperative for him/her to be provided with the best education besides clothes, shelter and food.

It is a bitter fact that Muslim parents are unaware of the method of imparting Talim to their offspring, which is Wajib after Walayah. They train and groom their children according to their way of understanding and are unaware of the rightful course. To satisfy their conscience they think that their Talim is in the right direction. When their children grow up being unaware of their religion, civilization and cultural values, their understanding of their faith is so weak that it does not help them in their life. And when children face troubles in their lives, they set aside all the values of religion and are inclined towards the liberal way of life which has been promulgated through their westernized education. This attitude usually alarms the parents and they seem confused as to what went wrong and begin cursing their own fortune. This phenomenon is really strange - why would you expect a mango after sowing the seed of an onion?

The process of Talim starts from the first day of birth. Many psychologists believe that Talim during childhood determines the future behaviour and personality of a child. Childhood is the best time to develop the nature and habits of a person and the family is the basic training center for this. Parents should try their best to inculcate Talim as Abi Abdillah Al-Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) informs: [2]

"The best heritage left behind by parents for their children is culture and Talim, not (only) property and wealth".

Al Shakhs al-Fadil Saheb al-Rasa'il, the 9th Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imam Ahmad al-Mastur (as) says:
[3]

As soon as a child is born, he comes under the influence of social factors for four complete years, during which he reaches a certain stage of intelligence and comprehension. After the fourth year the child begins to acquire his habits, knowledge, doctrines, crafts, and hobbies by imitation, as a result of his contact with those who happen to be around him. The masses copy the external behaviour of the dominant class. Children are apt to use an analogy characteristic of them. They believe that their parents are perfect and that the conditions prevailing in their own homes are models for all the conditions elsewhere. On the practical side, children are more apt to master the arts, sciences, and crafts of their parents than those of strangers. Knowledge is the abstraction of the knowable in the soul of the knower through the aid of a teacher. The aptitude to learn belongs to the soul alone. The end of teaching is to purify the souls of the taught and give them correct behaviour in order to prepare them for immortality and happiness in the hereafter. A science which does not lead to happiness in the hereafter is useless. Every soul is potentially learned; the parents and tutors polish its aptitude and help it to become learned in action. A teacher is absolutely necessary, especially to common people. The brain is able to store simultaneously all kinds of information, however diverse and contradictory they may be, since it stores their abstractions only. And in spite of the fact that the data stored in the brain fade gradually, and that some of them are sometimes totally forgotten, they do not annul one another. Essentially, knowledge is never spontaneous; it must be taught and learnt. A teacher is simply a guide for the soul to knowledge. Knowledge is handed down traditionally through religious leaders, the Imams, whose ultimate source of knowledge is the Nabi, who acquires his knowledge from Allah by inspiration.

The foremost Madrasah for imparting this Talim is the child's own home, where the tutors are the parents. Due to the materialistic lifestyles of today, parents unfortunately neglect their role which has severe adverse effects upon their children. They fail to realize that getting their child admitted in a reputed English medium school is not enough, and that they themselves have to give their offspring time. Parents feel that they must toil to give their kids all the material possessions and an expensive education which will enable them to get well-paying jobs; they therefore don't focus enough on sitting with their kids to impart ethical and moral values. This is not to say that most do not care for their children's livelihood, but that they neglect in fulfilling their basic emotional and spiritual needs.

Ignorance in guiding and grooming the children is unpardonable. Children are a valuable asset to every nation. The progress of the nation depends upon the Talim of the upcoming generation. Hence, those who are blessed to become parents should understand their responsibility towards their children. Parents often think that to groom children means to impose orders upon them. This attitude brings nothing but adverse consequences. Children become frustrated and guard their true feelings from their parents. Several studies of criminals showed that in their childhood they were deprived of love and affection of their parents, which turned them into monsters. It is also not enough that a child can only recite the sacred text while his actions are repugnant to Shariah. After puberty, such a child will be inclined towards immoralities and other sins.

Who can deny that Talim is a very useful thing, but what kind of Talim? Does Talim mean the acquisition of what makes a person go astray and lets them grope in the darkness like a lost soul? Or is it to acquire knowledge which strengthens Aqidah? Which Muslim would like the first kind of Talim? No one is against acquiring Talim by modern means, while remaining within the folds of Shariah, but Talim which makes one indifferent to Shariah is problematic. It is a parent's responsibility that they caution children to not be swept away by the tide of irreligiousness, and should not ignore the Talim of Shariah when acquiring modern Talim. Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as) discussed this: [4]

"In matters of Talim take care not to make your children like you. Do not superimpose your thoughts on their minds. Encourage them to meet the challenges of their age which will be different from the present times or the one in which you are living."

2. What kind of children are we creating?

When children feel that parents love them very much and they fulfill all their desires easily, their range of wishes goes beyond limits. Such children start ignoring instructions of parents and day by day become insolent by nature. When they enter the practical world, their expectations and attitude with others is similar to that they had with their parents who were always fulfilling their every command. As a matter of fact, in the practical world, people do not tolerate such people. This then leads to their isolation in society and causes them pain.

Besides, a spoilt child has a range of negative feelings which creates many problems for them later on. The male child later turns into a husband who has unreasonable expectations from his wife. He also wants total submission from her. Likewise, a girl, who was handed everything as child expects her spouse to fulfill demands and a lifestyle which might be beyond his means. She has similar expectations from her in-laws that they not point out any flaws, and takes advice meant for personal development very personally. Such kids who are usually products of a wealthy atmosphere begin suffering from superiority complex. They prefer to just listen to their praise and refuse to admit any fault. Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) says: [5]

"Superiority complex is the worst of all."

He (as) also says: [6]

"A person with superiority complex will shortly let everyone know all their weaknesses."

Many years back, I attended a birthday party of my kid's friend. There they played a game, the age old 'passing the parcel'. However, what was different was the way it was played. The child who was caught with the parcel when the music stopped was asked to leave the circle, but with that parcel as the gift, and then a new parcel was introduced. The game continued till every child got a gift. I asked the mother what was wrong with the earlier version, the version we had all grown up with. She replied:

"I do not like kids to be disappointed. See, here every child is happy as they get to take a gift home."

In a separate instance, I was in the park with my daughter. She was playing lock and key with her friends. Now, one of her friends fell down. Her mother, who was on the other side of the park ran to her son, all confused and upset. She scooped her son in her lap and started inquiring: "Are you hurt? Let me see... its okay Mama is here."

The child had a scraped knee, and who had seemed perfectly fine till then, began crying. Another time I was at somebody's place for lunch. Their 5-year old daughter refused to eat what was cooked. They felt so guilty that their daughter would go hungry that they cooked up her favourite pasta immediately. According to them, it was not the first time this had happened. Nowadays, many schools have done away with the prize distribution ceremony because they believe that there should be no competition. No first, second or third prize. Furthermore, kids today have a room full of toys and games. Some they ask for, some they do not. But they still get them anyway.

Now, what am I trying to say relaying these seemingly random incidents that appear to have no connection to each other? It is that everything in excess has become the new mantra of life. Our parents taught us self-reliance, while we hover around our children and want to protect them at all costs. We like to hold our babies closer to the protection of the nest. We go out of our way and rustle up something when they don't eat what's cooked at home for everyone else, because we don't want them to sleep hungry. Instead of letting them play outside, we organize activities for them. We do their homework and assignments. We even resolve their conflicts for them. It makes me wonder, what will happen to these kids when they grow up?

Will they get a gift every time they fail? Will they be able to handle disappointment? A child who has never been denied anything, how will he cope with rejection? There are a growing number of cases when kids run away from home or commit suicide because they are not able to deal with disappointing results in examinations or when they fail to secure admission in an institution of their choice. Will their parents keep them hidden in their bosom all their life? Our mothers never ran after us and a scraped knee was just that. We would be asked to wash it with some water and then forget about it. This style of parenting ensured that we toughened up and there was no drama that followed.

Falling and hurting was a part of daily life for our generation. We cycled, climbed up trees and jumped from the stairs. Today, kids travel in elevators and escalators (because they might fall down the stairs and get themselves hurt). I hardly see kids walking nowadays, unless it's for a marathon and they are required to pose for selfies.

Will they shy away from competition or be able to survive it? We can accompany our kids till the college gate and sit in the waiting area while they appear for a job interview, but a child who is never used to losing, how will he survive in the big bad world? We are raising our kids to be adult babies.

3. So what should we do?

Stop telling children that they are special all the time. They are not, at least not always. So reserve the praises for times that they actually deserve it. Stop going out of the way to create happiness in their life. Life is a mix of joys and sorrows, and it is that way for a reason. We have no right to interfere with nature. So let's stop pretending that everything is all right when it's not. Let the kids have their fair share of disappointments at an early age. It's better to fall at 10, than at 40.

*Among the most important factors of Tarbiyyah of children is the dynamic role of love through which the elders of the family can attract the children and command respect from them. Love is like food which is required for the growth of the body and helps in grooming and training one's children culturally and spiritually. Similarly, depriving children of love or loving them beyond limits are both equally harmful and destructive for their training and upbringing. Consequently, misfortune becomes their destiny and that is why Rasulullah(S) remarked: [7]
"Love the children and be kind and merciful unto them."*

Abi Abdillah Al-Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) says: [8]

"Whoever loves his children will be worthy of special divine mercy."

Another Hadith says: [9]

"Whoever makes his children happy Allah will write one goodness in his records and will make him happy and joyous on the day of judgement".

Caretaking of children can be done by anyone with means but proper Talim and Tarbiyyah that will make them exceptional, productive citizens, and good human beings can only be done by parents with the help of sincere mentors from society.

Selected Bibliography:

[1] Ayah 6: Surah Tahrīm

[2] Tradition of Ahl al-Bayt (as)

[3] Rasa'il Ikhwan us Safa, By: 9th Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imam Ahmad al-Mastur (as) vol. iv, pp. 118, 141, Beirut

[4] Kal'am Amir al-Mumineen, Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as)

[5] ibid

[6] ibid

[7] Hadith Maruf

[8] Abi Abdillah Al Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as)

[9] Hadith Maruf

Note: Effort has been made to trace all the copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked I will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity. This document may be used, only with this copyright notice included. Permission is granted to circulate among private individuals and groups, to post on internet forums, and include in not-for-profit publications subject to the following conditions: (1) Material used must be produced faithfully in full, without alteration or omission; (2) The author's subject title must remain unchanged, in whole or in part; (3) Material must be attributed to the author. Contact the author for all other rights, which are reserved. **Copyright © 2026 Qazi Dr. Shaikh Abbas Borhany al-Waleed**