

Talim and Tarbiyyah: Examining Early Childhood as the Foundation for Nurturing Faith and Character

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Abstract: Throughout history, Allah has appointed a continuous chain of Anbiya, Awsiya, and Aimmah for the Tarbiyyah (moral and spiritual upbringing) of humankind, each addressing their respective communities in their own language. The final Wahi, the Qur'an, was revealed in Arabic, the language of Rasulallah (S), who devoted his life to Talim Adab (etiquette and discipline) and the instillation of Aqidah and righteous conduct within his Ummah. He (S) designated Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) as his Wasi and sole Khalifah to continue this mission. Effective Tarbiyyah commences in childhood, shaping belief, ethics, and character. Ahadith Nabawiyyah stress the responsibility of parents and teachers, affirming that actions must embody what is taught. Since the formative years establish enduring habits, Tarbiyyah must be delivered with justice, compassion, and moderation, avoiding severity or negligence. Classical Muslim thinker Al-Shakhs al-Fadil, Saheb al-Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa, the 9th Fatimi Ismaili Imam Ahmad al-Mastur (AS), emphasised that true 'ilm whether spiritual, philosophical, or scientific, nourishes the soul and ensures holistic development. Parenting and teaching are thus sacred trusts, wherein failure inflicts spiritual harm upon both child and guardian. Hadith literature divides Tarbiyyah into three stages: ages 0–7 (care and liberty), 7–14 (discipline and learning), and 14–21 (guidance and consultation). This framework remains unparalleled in psychological and spiritual depth, harmonising affection with discipline to prepare children for a righteous life in both Dunya and Aakhirah. In the modern era, cultural erosion and materialism endanger spiritual values, intensifying the duty of parents and teachers. While institutions transmit 'ilm, the essence of Tarbiyyah nurturing faith, character, and manners, remains the irreplaceable responsibility of parents. The Qur'an injunction to protect one's family from the fire of Jahannam underscores that true parental success lies not merely in worldly attainment but in securing salvation. Rasulallah's (S) tenderness toward Hasan (AS) and Husain (AS) illustrates that mercy constitutes the heart of Tarbiyyah. Both Talim and Tarbiyyah, as affirmed by al Imam Ahmad al-Mastur (AS) in the Ikhwan al-Safa, form the Ahl al-Bayt's (AS) vision of nurturing with wisdom, balance, and compassion.

Keywords: Tarbiyyah, Parenting in Islam, Child Development, Rasulullah (S), Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as), Ikhwan al-Safa, Islamic Education, Adab, Habits, Qur'an, Sunnah, Spiritual Nourishment, Moral Upbringing, Family Responsibility, Islamic Pedagogy

Allah sent a chain of Anbiya, Awsiya and Aimmah in all Adw'ar for the Tarbiyyah of human generations, and they taught each nation in their own languages. The final Wahi came in the form of the Qur'an in the Arabic language which was, and is, the language of Arabia where Rasulullah (S) was born. He (S) spent his entire life in the Tarbiyyah of the people and taught them the lesson of "Adab" (proper conduct and etiquette.) Rasulullah (S) appointed Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) his sole-successor and "Baab" (gate) of his "Madinah" (city) of 'ilm, and entrusted him with this task of Tarbiyyah of the Ummah after him. It is through proper Tarbiyyah of a child that he maintains belief, a strong character and manners and work ethic. Rasulullah (S) has said:

"Each of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock..."

It is, therefore, the duty of every parent and teacher to instill the proper Tarbiyyah (education and upbringing) in children regarding every aspect of their lives in order to please Allah and to provide them with a strong foundation. Personal development should be based upon firm adherence to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Parents themselves should adhere to good deeds before preaching their children about the same. Moreover, children should be taught with love rather than by force. We must encourage our children to follow us in Salaat and Sawm. They can be motivated by rewarding them with gifts upon their establishing a good habit. We should teach our daughters the value of Hij'ab and dressing decently from childhood. The same should be taught to boys along with teaching them to treat women with respect and kindness. It is pertinent that children not be treated harshly but always explained politely which in turn encourages healthy conversations. This enables better understanding and willingness to learn about the teachings being imparted to them.

Relation between parents and children and teacher and students should be friendly, otherwise required goal of Tarbiyyah would not be achieved. Al Shakhs al-Fadil Saheb al-Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa, the 9th Fatimi Ismaili Imam Ahmad al-Mastur (as) touch at a sharp problem in Tarbiyyah.

The Imam believes: [1]

Neither the pupil may benefit from the tutor, nor may the tutor benefit from the pupil, unless there is a kind of intimacy between them. We know for certain that some kind of a reserved friendship is very useful in this respect. However the Ikhwan al-Safa overshoot themselves and speak frankly of "the desire of grown-up men for boys" as an incentive for effecting real Talim and Tarbiyyah. Furthermore, they mention explicitly that such manners belong only to nations which esteem science, art, literature, and mathematics, like the Persians, the peoples of Mesopotamia and Syria as well as the Greeks. Nomads, who as a rule have no interest in science, art, etc., lack this desire.

Al Shakhs al-Fadil, Saheb al-Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa (as) gave an example of Talim to guardians on how they should groom their children in various disciplines. He says: [2]

"Know that the truth is found in every religion (Deen) and is current in every tongue. What you should do, however, is to take the best and transfer yourself to it. Do not occupy yourself with imputing defects to the religions of people, rather try to see whether your religion is free from them."

He also says: [3]

"Acquire knowledge, whether philosophical, legal, mathematical, scientific or divine. All that is nourishment for the soul and life for it in this world and the Hereafter."

I conclude his above mentioned advices on his following statement: [4]

"An ideal individual is described as 'excellent, intelligent and possessing insight [as if] he is a Persian in origin, Arab in faith, a Hanif in religion, an Iraqi in manners, a Hebrew in tradition, a Christian in conduct, a Syrian in devotion, a Greek in knowledge, an Indian in vision, a mystic (Sufi) in his way of life (Sira), an angel in his morals, a leader (Rabbani) in opinion, divine ('ilahi) in gnostic knowledge (Ma'arif), and of everlasting qualities (Samdani)."

It is a great challenge for parents to sufficiently provide Tarbiyyah as cultural destruction and impious practices are greater today than they have ever been. Mere discussions cannot help our children unless operational plans are set up to accomplish their Tarbiyyah in light of Shariah. Devotion, affection and love for parents is considered voluntary 'ibadah. This reward and status has been bestowed upon parents due to their difficult responsibility of nurturing their children. It is hence important for them to understand the sublime duty of the upbringing and grooming of their child. Fostering and training is a part of human nature. The following two Ahadith draw our attention in this regard: [5]

i). "May Allah bless those parents who facilitate their children with Tarbiyyah and serve them with kindness."

ii). "May Allah send La'anah upon those parents who A'aq (disinherit) their children."

Any negligence in this regard is inexcusable, and will be considered a sin. The process of Tarbiyyah cannot stop in any phase of life. It is completed only when a person is laid to rest in the grave.

A famous Hadith states: [6]

"Obtain Talim from cradle to grave".

Another Hadith says: [7]

"All children are born fit and suitable for Islam. Later, their parents make them Christians, Jews or irreligious"

The first duty of every Muslim is to teach his child about Islam and the Qur'an as initial years are formative. A child is one of the greatest blessings, which if not appreciated, will be lost. Therefore, the art of handling children is a great gift.

A child in the caring age easily accepts the benefits of good nourishment, both mental and physical. Those children become mentally disturbed whose parents indulge in unhealthy activities, be it the father or mother. Children are acutely aware of what's going on around them and are able to understand when things aren't right in the house. In these circumstances, the responsibility of the other parent becomes greater to groom the child adequately. Parental behavior should be so upright that the child shouldn't feel any difference between the theory that's being taught to him and his parents practice. A point to be noted is that a baby from the first day of birth is programmed to learn. Little by little and time to time, he develops an independent nature, taste and mentality, regardless of the parents' awareness or approval. Up to the age of five, the brain is most conditioned to soak up the surrounding experiences which are hard to shake off later on. Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as) says: [8]

"The most difficult politics is to remove the habits."

Examining human nature, Ali (as) concludes: [9]

"Habit controls human nature like an Emperor."

He further clarifies it: [10]

"Habit becomes nature."

In short, a child's habits in the early stages are easier to change and such efforts are more fruitful than those later on. If parents sincerely try to save their children from ill forces, in sha Allah they will be able to produce a good member of society and would save human life from the harmful forces in this manner. Qur'an praises the savior of human life in the following words: [11]

"One who saves a single life, saves all humanity".

Worldly life is fixed in time while the afterlife is infinite. Similar to the body, if the soul does not receive spiritual nourishment, it dies. Basic and elementary spiritual guidance is the first step towards a good Talim.

Moreover, it is imperative that parents never beat their children as studies have proved that doing so to inculcate any habit will not only make them obstinate in their approach, but will also hamper their overall development. Islam right from the beginning has prohibited its followers from physically assaulting children. This Hadith explains the rights of a child over his father: [12]

"A child enjoys three rights over his father"

a). He must select a good name for his child

b). Educate him

c). When he matures, the father should make provisions for his marriage.

It is compulsory upon parents to select good and meaningful names of their children from the names of the chosen ones of Allah. Abi Abdillah Al-Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) says: [13]

"Select good names of your children because they will be called on the day of judgement by these names."

Time to time guidance ensures that one remains alert and doesn't fall into the pits of ills and sins, and instead is led towards "Sirat al-Mustaqeem" (the Right Path). The lack of guidance and warning is one of the most important reasons for the destruction of the younger generation. Due to the negligence in upbringing and grooming, a child can easily get himself involved in

questionable activities. This often leads to the destruction of the child which is a dilemma for the entire family. If a girl/boy gets out of control and follows a free lifestyle, it is the result of parental negligence.

The influence of the family on a child's cultural, social and moral development always reflects. Thus, the role of the parents, especially the role of the mother, is significant. Mothers usually spend more time with their children compared to the fathers hence children are normally more attached to them. Nurturing sentiments and affection are largely found stronger in a mother and this devotion equips a mother to take better care of a child and train him. Her influence is particularly strong during the pre-school period. At this time a mother is the most influential source of Tarbiyyah, love and cheerfulness. Success, a sense of security and self-confidence in children is largely as a result of the mother.

Islam calls for care and attention towards children and advocates for their respect and honour. Rasulallah(S) says: [14]

"Respect your children and treat them nicely so that Allah may bless you in this regard."

Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) said: [15]

"The most wretched man is he who shows disrespect to others."

Rasulallah(S) always treated children with utmost kindness and love. When he used to return from a journey, Hasan (as) and Husain (as) would run towards him excitedly and welcome him. Rasulallah(S) would pick them up and shower them with affection, place them on his camelback and would direct his Ash'ab to do the same with the children on the street, and in this way he would enter the city. Ibn Abbas (ra) transmitted that Rasulallah(S) once remarked: [16]

"Whoever makes his daughter happy is like the one who has freed one slave from the progeny of Ismail (as), and whoever makes his son happy is like the one who has cried due to fear of Allah."

Moreover, one of the most vital tasks in the training of children is to render justice among them. It is necessary for the parents to deal with all the children justly and equally, and see to it that no feeling of oppression creeps in them because it will be very difficult to remove from their personalities. A person came in Nabavi presence along with his two sons. He kissed one and neglected the other. On seeing this unjust behavior, Rasulallah(S) remarked: [17]

"Treat your children with equality. Deal justly and equally among your children as you expect them to be just to you."

Furthermore, parents care for their children's physical health, but are unaware of the extent of psychological problems facing children these days. These days the focus is mainly over the external appearance rather than cultivating pleasant and important habits which leads to holistic development. The focus on materialistic activities has prevented people from focusing on the A'akhirah (hereafter), not only for them but also for their children. A Hadith says: [18]

"A girl due to her shamelessness and immodesty will be thrown in Jahannam and right after her the mother of the girl would be thrown there, despite the mother herself being very modest and covering herself. At this, the Malaek would question Allah as to why this

treatment is being meted out to the woman. Allah would reply that she was modest herself but did not give her daughter the lesson of piety, modesty and Hij'ab."

Then Rasulullah (S) continued: [19]

"Similarly a boy will be thrown in Jahannam for not observing Faraid. His father, on whose forehead the mark of Sajdah is visible, will also accompany his son to Jahannam because he never awoke his child for morning Salaat for the fear of disturbing his sleep."

Likewise, the same treatment would be accorded to the father who in the month of Ramadan himself observed Sawm but never persuaded his child (who reached the suitable age and was physically capable) for Sawm due to the fear of physical weakness of his child. He himself recited the Qur'an, but never bothered checking whether his child consumed pornography. No excuse can be accepted for the parents who are busy in Sajdah, whereas their children indulge in ruinous activities. No doubt, parents of such children will be regarded as offenders, and will die in that state.

According to Hadith Literature, the most sensitive period of Tarbiyyah has been divided into three phases. The first phase begins from birth and lasts until the 7th year. In this phase, the child should enjoy liberty. He should be free to do as he pleases, except for illegal and harmful activities. Rasulullah(S) says: [20]

"The first seven years, the child is your lord, and the next seven, he is your servant. After fourteen he is your adviser".

All the intellectuals of the world combined cannot express this golden principle of guidance in volumes which Rasulullah(S) has expressed only in a few words, through the inspiration of Wahi. He said:

"First seven years, the child is your lord".

The lord is served by servants to his comfort and pleasure. They look after him and provide all possible necessities. Study this Hadith: [21]

"After the first seven years of age up to fourteen, the child is your slave".

Slave translates to one who serves and obeys you. If the child will not learn to serve and obey he will become lazy and ultimately his professional career will suffer as well.

The 2nd phase is from the 7th until the 14th year. In this phase, the child should obtain Talim, learn about Aqidah, religion, etiquettes etc. For the 3rd phase, Rasulullah(S) guides: [22]

"From 14 up to 21 years, the child is your adviser so take him into your consultation".

This 3rd phase begins after the 14th year when the parents should have prepared their children as their friend and an independent person. However, at this age, parents should help children enter their professional field and teach lessons drawing from their experiences. This Tarbiyyah grooms the child to such an extent that he is able to differentiate between right and wrong.

Moreover, parents devoid of the concept of love and kindness must pay attention to the Hadith: [23]

"Extend love to your children and show kindness to them."

Another Hadith instructs: [24]

"Kiss your children more and more because in exchange for every kiss, Allah elevates you to a higher position".

A person came in the presence of Nabi (S) and submitted: [25]

"I never kissed any child up till now and still ignore the divine guidance".

When he left, Rasulullah (S) declared:

"This man seems to be hellish".

A Sahabi visited Rasulullah (S) when he was engaged in caressing his two beloved grandsons, Al Imam al-Hasan (as) and Al Imam al-Husain (as). Surprised, the Sahabi asked: [26]

"O Rasulullah (S)! I have ten children but have never touched even one of them (with affection)."

Thereupon Rasulullah (S) raised his eyes and remarked:

"It seems compassion and kindness has left your heart."

He affirmed at another place: [27]

"Those who do not extend love and kindness to their children and do not have regard and respect for their elders, are not amongst us."

Rasulullah (S) was always kind to children and loved them deeply. He used to carry them on his shoulders and children were always joyful in his company. Rasulullah (S) too would rejoice at the pure happiness of the children and a smile would appear on his face. Al-Imam al-Sajjad Ali ibn al-Husain Zain al-Abideen (as) said regarding the rights of a child: [28]

"The right of your child is that you should know that he is from you and will be ascribed to you, through both his good and his evil, in the immediate affairs of this world. You are responsible for what has been entrusted to you, such as educating him in good conduct – Husn al-Aadab – pointing him in the direction of his Lord, and helping him obey Him. So act towards him as one who knows that he will be rewarded for good towards him and punished for evildoing."

However, the love extended to a child from the parents makes him successful only when it is accompanied with Tarbiyyah. Love without Tarbiyyah and Ma'arif is akin to being handicapped. These two can only be effective when they get together. If a mother does not allow her children to exercise without depending on her, they will always remain dependent by nature. Abi Jafar al-Imam Mohammad al-Baqir (as) says about the love of parents: [29]

"The worst parents are those who are extravagant and excessive in showing love to their child."

The excessiveness in love sometimes takes parents to such a stage that they yield and obey to their children to keep them happy in all stages of life. Due to this attitude parents even ignore the bad habits of their children, which might be repugnant to the Shariah. They seldom ignore their bad habits and shortcomings to make them happy. Abi Jafar Al-Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as) said: [30]

"The worse parents are those who show unlimited love and affection and unnecessary sympathy to their children".

It is true that a child deserves love and kindness, but love which spoils the child is not good. Love is like food; only in the right quantity is it beneficial. Excessive love often diverts the attention of the child from the right direction.

Rasulullah (S) used to recite Salaam upon children and would tell his Ash'ab: [31]

"I greet children with Salaam and respect them, and Muslims should follow my behavior and should always be warm and loving with children."

Rasulullah (S) said about children: [32]

"O Muslims! Fathers and mothers! O my followers! Be kind and compassionate towards children, for someone who is not kind to children has no place amongst the Muslims."

Children are the gift of Allah. Any negligence and breach of trust in this gift is unpardonable. A learned child is a responsible founder of the next generation. Betterment and progress of society depends on the upcoming generations. A child is entrusted to his parents for safe-keeping as the child's pure heart is akin to a precious gem. When young, it has yet to take any shape and is like pure soil. You will reap what you sow in it. If children are taught the tenets of Im'an, the Qur'an and the commandments of Allah, they will attain spiritual and worldly happiness. And their parents and teachers will share in this happiness of theirs. If they are not taught and trained, they will definitely be spoiled, spiritually and morally. The sin of each evil they will commit will be shared by their parents and teachers as well. Qur'an declares in the 6th Ayah of Surah al-Tahrim: [33]

"Protect yourselves and those in your homes and under your command (Tarbiyyah) from the fire (Jahannam)!"

It is more important for a father to protect his children against the fire of Hell than against the worldly fire. Protecting them against the fire of Hell is teaching them Im'an, the Fara'id and difference between Halal and Har'am to accustom them to ibadah (Jismani and Ruhani), and to protect them from immoral friends. The source of all kinds of decadent deeds is an evil company.

In conclusion, the craze of money minting has reached the peak of madness these days. The affluent have now embarked upon a dizzying lifestyle. Governesses are now being hired to look after children. This nursery culture has alienated the child from his parents. Parents should keep in mind that schools charging exorbitant fees cannot and will not build the character of a child. In an institution, a child can learn but cannot feel the touch of parents' affection which is a great source of inspiration. None of the institutions can fulfill the responsibilities of the parents regarding guidance. Moreover, the responsibility of parents is not confined to giving their child a good name, but to be a beacon of light for the child as far as manner and etiquettes are concerned. And this is a precursor for a good moral character.

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