

# Raising Ahmadi Children in the West

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Our Lord, grant us of our spouses and children the delight of *our* eyes, and make us a model for the righteous. (*Al-Furqan, 25:75*)

## 1.0 Introduction:

Raising children is essentially a life long process that requires active participation by both parents. It starts with the parents' belief and value system – what they stand on and what they stand for – and continues in various ways as long as they have children. It is an amazing process to gain humbling awareness of one's shortcomings and a profound opportunity of self-improvement for the parents.

As I discuss this topic today, I am mindful of the fact that it is easier to talk about it than practice it. However, we all need to understand some of the basic Islamic principles about raising children and our success will be determined by the extent to which we can put these principles into practice.

## 2.0 Goal/Purpose:

It is said that to be successful at anything, start with the end in mind, plan for it and prepare for it. So, if we wish to raise Ahmadi Children, we first need to know the end result we desire. Our goal is to raise children who will be able to fully discharge their obligations to Allah (*Haqooqullah*) as well as their fellow human beings (*Haqooqul Ibad*). Briefly:

*Haqooqullah* include Worship and Remembrance of Allah, fasting, zakat, hajj, etc.

*Haqooqul Ibad* implies being a good son/daughter, husband/wife, father/mother, relative, neighbor, friend, and a responsible, law-abiding citizen.

Raising Ahmadi Children also implies raising them per the Islamic standard, not the standard of the West or the East. This is because we believe that Islam is the most complete religion for mankind, Holy Qur'an is the perfect guidance, and Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> is the best role model.

Therefore, it is critical to differentiate between the Islamic values and traditions, and our cultural preferences and biases; especially in the West where the social values and norms are fundamentally different from those espoused by Islam.

According to the Holy Qur'an, the Islamic standard of existence is the Worship of Allah as we read: **I have not created the jinn and the men except that they may worship me. (...)** So, when we say *Haqooqullah* and *Haqooqul Ibad*, we mean emulating the attributes of Allah and obeying all His commandments to the best of our abilities. In other words, the purpose of all our endeavors and interactions should be the pleasure of Allah. Therefore, the litmus test for the propriety of our priorities, preferences and thought processes should be their alignment with the pleasure of Allah, not the pleasure of our peers or the society around us.

We find a wonderful prayer in the Holy Qur'an: **My Lord, grant me *the power that I may be grateful for Thy favor which Thou have bestowed upon me and my parents, and that I may do such good works as may please Thee. And make my seed righteous for me.*** (*Al-Ahqaf, 46:16*)

This prayer constitutes a perpetual cycle of conduct and aspirations for parents as well as children, a seamless transition between generations. Thus, as parents we need to live according to the will of Allah and train our children to do the same.

### **3.0 Methodology (Role Model):**

Given this lofty goal, let us look at the methodology of proper parenting.

1. We should mind the big picture and continually reflect upon the long term implications of short term actions. A seemingly benign choice by us may terminally affect our children. So, how we choose to live today will largely determine how our children will live tomorrow.
2. We should know that our deeds speak louder than our words. We need to be role models for our children in everything good and realize that raising children is not a set of tasks or chores; rather it is a way of life. And, only a healthy and meaningful way of life is worth living.

3. We should remember that most habits are easier to adopt and cultivate in the earlier years; however, bad habits developed earlier are very difficult to get rid of later. As it is said that well begun is half done, it is important to nurture good behavior in our children from the beginning; which means the young parents need to adopt Islamic Lifestyle sooner than later.
4. We should note that in their formative years, children learn by copying or following directions. However, as they grow older, we need to train them to make right choices on their own. As it is said, give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, but teach him how to fish and you feed him for life. The children need to learn to differentiate between right and wrong and the consequences thereof so they can make the right choices on their own.
5. We need to be consistent and constant in our parenting efforts. The importance of both parents being on the same page and working toward the same goal with a mutually supportive and harmonious approach can not be overemphasized. Serious differences and disputes between parents are damaging to the children emotionally as well as psychologically.

In short, proper parenting requires thoughtful planning and preparation. Our young parents or parents-to-be should plan and prepare for the critical lifestyle transitions; first from their playful, self-centric, bachelor lifestyle to a married lifestyle that deserves adjustments, give and take, and sharing and caring for the spouse as well as the in-laws, and then to a more mature and responsible, family-centric lifestyle once they are blessed with children.

Throughout these transitions, they need to be realistic about their ambitions, expectations, and challenges that lie ahead. For proper preparation, they need to understand Islamic teachings and seek sound advice from competent sources. They may get in trouble if they only talk to their peers and friends. They should consult more mature and knowledgeable elders and embrace them as mentors.

#### **4.0 Some Islamic Principles:**

Now, let us look at some critical Islamic principles for raising children. Our western society prides itself for freedom. But, with freedom comes the

responsibility of choice. Islam shows us right from wrong and guides us to the path of making the right and responsible choices.

#### 4.1 Supplications (*Dua*):

First and foremost, our parenting efforts must start with supplications to Allah. The Holy Qur'an teaches us to pray for pure offspring in the words of Hadhrat Zachariah<sup>as</sup>: **My Lord, grant me pure offspring from Thyself.** (*Al-Imran, 3:39*)

So, the notion of raising Ahmadi children should be on our minds even before our children are born. We should be praying for not only our children but also for our spouses and ourselves. As I recited in the beginning, we should pray:

**Our Lord, grant us of our spouses and children the delight of *our* eyes, and make us a model for the righteous.** (*Al-Furqan, 25:75*)

#### 4.2 Prayers (*Salaat*):

We should be focused on teaching and training our children to love Allah, pray to Allah, and trust in Allah. We find in the Holy Qur'an that Hadhrat Ibrahim<sup>as</sup> used to pray: **My Lord, make me observe Prayer, and my children too.** (*Ibrahim, 14:41*) Similarly, the Holy Qur'an teaches us: **Enjoin Prayer on thy family, and be constant therein.** (*Ta Ha, 20:133*)

Now, there is a narrow window of formative years to accomplish this in. And, it will happen naturally if the children see their parents and elders doing so. In the beginning the children will playfully pick up the habit of praying by just copying their parents. The Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> said that at age 7, the parents should formally inspire their children to join in prayers. At age 10, as they get exposed to other interests and may get distracted, the parents should admonish them to be regular in daily prayers. However, after age 12, the parents may only remind them about it. If the parents heed this advice, they will not have to anguish later on.

Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih IV<sup>ra</sup> used to say that he learned to be regular in daily prayers because his mother insisted on observing the daily prayers, on-time, in congregation, in the mosque. In his early childhood she had him lifted off his bed

and put under water if he did not wake up for Salaatul Fajr. Strict adherence to the five daily prayers fosters discipline, responsibility and purity in children.

Initially, ensuring punctual observation of the daily prayers is important. Later on, by the Grace of Allah, the quality of their prayers will improve and their love for and trust in Allah will naturally follow. And finally, according to the Holy Qur'an, their prayers will safeguard them against indecency and evil. (*Al-Ankabut, 29:46*)

### **4.3 Company of the Truthful:**

We should watch the company our children keep. The Holy Qur'an teaches us: **Be with the truthful.** (*Al-Tauba, 9:119*) Here again, if we as parents are truthful and keep company with the truthful, our children will naturally follow. It is said that a man is known by the company he keeps. In the past it meant the physical company. Today, however, it is also the virtual company we keep.

With the advent of the ubiquitous electronic gadgets, the temptation is to mindlessly spend more time in the virtual company than some time in the purposeful physical company. We can waste our free time on TV, DVDs, iPods, MySpace, YourFace, Youtube, and Chat rooms; or invest our precious time in the Remembrance of Allah, the mosque, purposeful readings, meaningful discussions, watching MTA, and getting to know the truthful.

Unfortunately, we have the propensity to take the easy way out. Most of us have relatively easy access to this irresistible virtual world. But, it is insane and a slippery slope. On the other hand, the company of the truthful and pursuit of some larger than life goal seem difficult and boring. It is a struggle and requires high resolve and serious forethought.

While modern technology is wonderful and unavoidable, it is the end to which we employ it that is of the essence. It can provide easy and affordable access to the company of the truthful. So, for starters, the key word is balance. Till we can instinctively embrace the company of the truthful, the least we should do is be highly selective and strike a balance between the mundane and the sublime.

To motivate ourselves for this difficult choice, we need to take a hard look at the long term consequences of our preferences and priorities. Would our choices

result in fantasies, frustrations and desperation or would they result in ambition, exuberance, and satisfaction? What behavior would our choices drive in us and in our children? Another way to make the right choice is to ask, would I do this if my parents or others were watching?

If we become truthful, be in the company of the truthful, and buy what we need rather than whatever is available or affordable, we will be able to influence our children to be truthful, keep company with the truthful, and make proper use of the modern technology. As parents, we should be our children's first and foremost company. If we develop a bond of mutual understanding, respect, compassion, trust and confidence with our children, they won't need to look elsewhere for company.

#### 4.4 Wisdom:

We need to do parenting with wisdom. According to the Holy Qur'an:

Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in a way that is best. *(Al-Nahl, 16:126)*

Wisdom demands moderation. The Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> said: **Moderation is best in all affairs.** When parenting we need to find a balance between negligence and indulgence, and trust and suspicion. Similarly, we need to know the difference between advising and nagging, and monitoring and snooping. This is especially critical when the children are in their adolescence.

Wisdom also demands that we 'know' our children by getting personally involved in their lives with mutually respectful, frank and honest communication. We must know their friends, interests, aspirations, challenges, preferences, priorities, and tendencies. We should coach, assist and support them in solving their problems.

However, the focus of our parenting should be *islahah*, that is, behavioral reformation. We should evaluate and rethink our parenting approach if our actions or comments appear to be resulting in contemptuous or rebellious reaction in our children. We should be firm but polite with them.

On the other hand, we should know our own limitations and seek appropriate professional help, if necessary, for the physical and mental health of our children in a timely manner. A stitch in time can save nine; any procrastination in this regard can have serious consequences.

Wisdom also requires proper anger management. At times, parenting can be very stressful, frustrating, or at times enraging. Some situations can easily spin out-of-control. At such times, we need to swallow our pride, exercise self-control, and refrain from meaningless threats and verbal or physical abuse.

The Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup> said:

An individual with self-respect and self-control, who is also forbearing and dignified, has the right to correct a child to a certain extent or guide the child. But a wrathful and hot-headed person who is easily provoked is not fit to be a guardian of children. (*Malfuzat, vol. 2, p. 4*)

Regarding the corporal punishment, the Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup> said:

Beating of children is an act which can be termed as a sort of polytheism (*shirk*). It actually means that the ill-tempered person makes himself a partner of God in giving guidance and sustaining the creatures.

I wish that, instead of punishing children, parents would resort to prayer, and would make it a habit to supplicate earnestly for their children as the supplications of the parents for their children are particularly accepted by God. (*Malfuzat, vol. 2, p. 4*)

#### **4.5 Fair Treatment:**

Islam teaches us to treat our children fairly and respectfully. The Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> said: **Respect your children and cultivate good manners in them.** (*Ibne Majah*)

Each child has a unique nature and a distinct set of strengths and challenges. As such, each child deserves a unique parenting approach. What works for one child may not work for another. However, no child should have any complex about his or her sibling being the favorite child.

Hadhrat Nu'man ibn Bashir<sup>ra</sup> relates that his father took him to the Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> and said: I have gifted one of my slaves to this son of mine. The Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> asked: Have you done this for all your children? He answered: No. The Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> said: Be mindful of your obligation to Allah and do justice between your children. Do you desire that your children would behave equally well towards you? He said: Certainly. The Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> said: Then why don't you? (*Bukhari & Muslim, #1779/p297*)

#### **4.6 General Behavior:**

Regarding general behavior and attitude, Islam teaches us to: **Vie with one another in good works.** (*Al-Baqarah, 2:149*) So, we need to inculcate in our children a competitive attitude and a mindset of doing their best in everything good, particularly in learning religious and secular knowledge.

The Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> said: **Acquisition of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman.** (*Baihiqi*) We should nurture a knowledge-centric culture not money-centric. Our children should not get distracted from their long term educational and professional goals due to their short term money making opportunities.

As humble followers of the Seal of the Prophets<sup>sa</sup> and the Messiah<sup>as</sup> of this age, we and our next generations need to be the moral and spiritual leaders of the world, and for that we need to excel others in religious and secular knowledge.

#### **5.0 Jama'at Role:**

Now, what role can and should the jama'at play in raising Ahmadi Children? The best thing the jama'at can and does do, under the divine Institution of Khilafat, is to invite us all to volunteer our time and services for it. What we can gain from jama'at is directly proportional to what we invest in it. If we wish to raise our children properly, we should selflessly serve the jama'at with our families.

Active participation in jama'at and auxiliary activities provides a meaningful alternative to the wasteful activities in a healthy social environment. And, with the current technology, distance should not be an issue. We can participate through MTA, e-mails, teleconferences, and the like.



## 6.0 Conclusion:

We must remember that our children are but a sacred trust with us from Allah and raising children is a very serious, difficult and humbling undertaking. Allah warns us in the Holy Qur'an:

Prove not false to your trusts knowingly; and know that your possessions and your children are but a trial. (*Al-Anfal, 8:28-29*)

Parenting requires infinite patience and prayers. The Holy Qur'an teaches us: Seek help with patience and prayer. (*Al-Baqarah, 2:154*) At times, when we may seem to run out of ideas and answers we should pray: Our Lord, perfect our light for us and forgive us. (*Al-Tahrim, 66:9*)

I am acutely aware of the overwhelming nature of this tremendous responsibility. However, we must recognize that no matter how hard and sincerely we may strive, at the end of the day it is merely the Grace and Mercy of Allah that will save our children and keep them on the right path.

I will conclude my humble submission with a couple of statements of the Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup> that say it all. Hadhrat Aqdu<sup>as</sup> said:

I pray for my children and require them to follow a broad set of rules of behavior and no more. Beyond this I put my full trust in Allah Almighty with the confidence that the seed of good fortune inherent in each of them will flourish at its proper time. (*Malfuzat, vol. 2, p. 5*)

Similarly, Hadhur<sup>as</sup> said:

There are certain prayers that are a daily routine for me. I pray for myself that God may let me do the kind of things that would manifest His honor and grandeur and He may make me fully resigned to His will. Then I pray for my wife that He may grant me children through her who may prove to be the coolness of my eyes and who may live their lives in perfect accord with the will of God. Then I pray for my children that God may make all of them servants of His religion. (*Malfuzat, vol. 2, p. 4*)