

Golden Principles of Raising Children

By

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(May God Shower His Mercy Upon Him)

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TRANSLATOR’S NOTE:

The English translator has added all explanations given within square brackets and parenthesis and assumes all responsibilities for any mistranslations and seeks Allah’s forgiveness for that. All text in Arabic has been transliterated into English and has been italicized. Urdu translation of this book of Imam Ghazali was done by Sadruddin Hasan Amritsari and published by Dar-ul Isha’at, Pakistan. Amritsari’s Urdu translation was utilized for doing this English translation.

CHILDREN'S INITIAL EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ATTAINMENT OF MORAL VALUES - INTRODUCTION OF THE BOOK

Adopting an effective method for training children is extremely important and necessary. It is because a child is Allah's trust in parents' hands and the child's heart is like a nice, clean, and simple mirror which, although, is devoid of any types of impressions or shapes, is capable of accepting the influence of all types of impressions and influences and it can be inclined towards any thing you like. Therefore, if good habits are inculcated in the child and if he/she is instructed in knowledge, then the child after gaining such excellent nourishment (upbringing), achieves the real success of this life and of the life hereafter. In this [success], the parents and the teachers of the child become entitled to a share in the rewards [from Allah for good upbringing of the child]. And if bad habits are inculcated (nurtured) in a child and [if the child is] left unhindered (unattended/free) like animals, then he/she gets destroyed after becoming ill mannered. The burden of sin [of such negligence] falls on his/her guardian and caretaker. Allah, the Exalted, has said [in the Holy Quran]:

"Ya Ayyuhal Lazeena Aamano Qu Anfusakum Wa Ahleekum Naarun."
"O you who believe! Save yourself and your family from the fire of Hell."

And when the father saves his child from the fires of this world, then as a first priority, it is incumbent (obligatory) upon him to save his child from the fire of the hereafter (Hellfire) and the only way of doing this is that he teaches the child manners and civilization and educate him/her in the best of morals and protect him/her from bad companions and friends and should not let the desire for physical beautification, fine dresses, ornamentation, physical ease, and comfort-seeking settle in his/her heart, otherwise, the child after growing up, will waste his/her precious life in desiring and seeking these lowly things and will get eternally destroyed by them. Instead, it's incumbent upon the father to keep a strict watch and care from a very early age [of his child].

NECESSITY AND IMPORTANCE OF PERMISSIBLE (*HALAL*) FOOD

For upbringing of the child and for nursing, [in the absence of the mother] a woman of good character and religiosity should be appointed, who eats lawful (*Halal*) food because the milk that comes from unlawful food, has no betterment or blessing in it, instead, if the child is brought up with milk that comes from unlawful (*Haram*) sources, then evil gets permeated into the very fiber (consciousness/psychology/inner being) of the child, and because of that, the temperament of the child gets inclined towards Satanic (evil) deeds. And when [the parent feels that] the child is able to discern between the good and the bad then a complete nurturing of the child should begin. This [phase of child's life] is indicated by the appearance of the initial signs of shyness (*Haya/modesty*), because when the child, realizing his/her respect and honor, starts to feel shy and because of shyness starts to leave doing certain things, then this is only the result of the light of intelligence emerging in him/her. This [emergence of the light of intelligence] happens to such an extent that he/she starts to think of some things as good and of some things as bad, and starts to feel shameful about certain deeds and this very realization of shyness (*Haya*) is a huge favor on the child by Allah, the Exalted. And it's a clear sign that argues for (clearly shows) his/her moderation of the moral values and the purity of the heart. Instead, we should think of it in this way that this consciousness of the realization of good and bad [in the child], is a glad tidings from

the nature (i.e. Allah) that this child upon attaining puberty, will possess perfect intelligence. That's why a child with shyness (*Haya/modesty*), should never be left free (liberated), but instead, making use of his/her shyness (*Haya*) and discernment [between good and bad], a full training should be given to him/her.

AN EXPLANATION OF THE ETIQUETTES OF EATING

The first bad desire that dominates a child, is the greed to eat more; therefore, it's extremely necessary to teach him/her the etiquettes of eating.

For example, [the etiquettes are] to eat food only with the right hand, to recite "*Bismillah*" ("In the Name of Allah") in the beginning, to eat from the front [of the plate], to wait for others to begin before he/she does, to not start staring at the food [when others start first], to not even stare at others who are eating, to not eat in an unnecessary hurry, to chew the food properly, to not continuously [or hurriedly] put morsels of food in his/her mouth [but should do that gradually], to not soil his/her hand and clothes with the food [by dropping it]. Sometimes, the child should be fed only the bread so that he/she does not consider the curry [to go with bread] to be a necessity so as to not even be able to do without it. Likewise, one should narrate in front of the child, the undesirability of eating too much, for example, those who eat excessively should be compared to animals. The child should be told to not follow the kids who eat too much and the kids who eat less and are well trained should be praised in front of the child. The child attention should be drawn towards sacrificing the food for the sake of others [who are less fortunate] by taking care of the needs of his/her companions. The habit should be developed in the child to not care too much about [fine] food and to be content with simple food.

AN EXPLANATION OF THE ETIQUETTES OF DRESSING

Similarly, instead of colorful and silk clothes, the love and desire for simple and plain clothes should be developed in the heart of the child. It should be firmly impressed on his/her mind that to wear such clothes is not appropriate and pious people abhor such ways of dressing. Such things (admonitions) should be told to the child from time to time in a generalized way. And it's an obligation on the parents that when they see any child wearing silky or brightly colored dresses in front of them, then they should express their disapproval [of such ways of dressing] in front of the child and should instill their undesirability [for such dresses] in the heart of the child. The parents should protect their child from meeting with all those children who are accustomed to prosperity, seeking comforts (comfortable lifestyle), and dressing proudly. They (parents) should also protect the child from the company of all those people who tell him/her stories about such ways of indulgence [like seeking comforts, dressing proudly, etc.]. Any child, who is left unattended [in such things] during his/her initial growth (upbringing), after growing up commonly becomes ill-mannered, liar, thief, tale-bearer, intransigent (stubborn), evil talker, sarcastic, cunning, deceiver, and foolish. The only source of protecting the child from all these evils is good education and training, after that, the child should be admitted into a religious school so that he/she studies Quran and *Hadith* (traditions of Prophet Muhammad [Peace and blessing of Allah be upon him]), acquires knowledge of the conditions, biography, and traditions of Allah's righteous slaves so that from the early childhood, the love of the saints (May Allah shower His Mercy upon all of them) get established in his/her heart.

EPIDEMIC OF POETRY

Furthermore, protect the child from romantic poetry and romantic-minded poets and also make him/her stay away from those writers who think that such poetry is an indication of the life of the heart and subtlety of perception [or expression], because such things sow the seeds of corruption (*Fasad*) and evil in the minds of children.

METHOD OF PERSUADING TOWARDS GOOD AND STOPPING FROM EVIL

Whenever the child displays a good quality or displays a praiseworthy action, then father should praise the child and give him/her such a gift that will make the child happy and should praise the child in front of others. If the child then does something opposite [to his/her praiseworthy quality or action], then it's appropriate to show unawareness of it and [the father] should not dishonor or humiliate the child nor should he highlight the fault. Instead, the father [or parent] should not even let the child know that he even thinks that the child has the courage to do such a thing in front of him, especially, in the case, when the child himself/herself tries to cover and hide the fault. It's because revealing the mistakes [of the child] at times, is the cause for the child to become more daring to such an extent that slowly and gradually the child does not even care about his/her faults being revealed. Even after taking such a wise precaution, if the child does the same [bad] thing again, then it's suitable to rebuke him/her in private and the fault of the bad deed should be revealed to him/her and should be told, "Beware! Do not ever do this bad thing again. God forbid, if this is found by someone, then you will get humiliated in front of the people", [etc. etc. and other statements can be guessed from this].

HARMS OF EXCESSIVE SCOLDING

But it should be kept in mind that the child not be rebuked excessively, because it creates a habit in the child to listen to condemnation and scolding and increases in him/her the courage to commit wrongs. And slowly and gradually, the value of admonitions diminishes from the heart of the child.

Similarly, it's necessary for the father that when he talks to the child, he maintains his awe and fear [in the heart of the child] and should rarely rebuke him/her. And the mother should make him/her fear the father when the child is being stubborn and should strictly stop the child from doing bad things.

ETIQUETTES OF SLEEPING

The child should be told not to sleep during the day because it creates laziness but he/she should not be stopped from sleeping at night. However, the child should still be stopped from sleeping on a soft bed so that the child's bodily organs will get strong and the body will not get disfigured, due to which the child will not be able to live without comforts. Instead, the habits of sleeping on hard beds, wearing non-fine (simple) clothes, eating simple food should be instilled in the child. The child should be stopped from doing things in a clandestine way because he/she knows that

it's bad, that's why the child hides it. If it's ignored, then the child will develop the habit of doing bad things.

Similarly, the habit of walking during the day and exercising should be instilled in the child so that he/she does not become lethargic and lazy. However, utmost care must be taken to ensure that the child does not expose his/her head, knees, thighs, etc. Furthermore, the child should not walk too fast nor should keep his/her hands loose [which is a sign of laziness] but instead, the child should keep his/her hands close to the body and should be active.

PROHIBITION OF ARROGANCE AND PRIDE

The child should be prohibited from showing pride on anything from the possessions of his/her parents, his food items, clothes, even from something like his/her writing tablet and ink. Instead, the habit of dealing with all of his/her companions with humility, respect, honor, and having pure (clean/civilized) conversation, should be inculcated in him/her and should not be allowed to take anything from other children. If it's a child of wealthy parents then he/she should be explained that the honor and rank is in giving and not in taking, instead, taking [from others] has in it [the characteristics of] lowliness, humiliation, and insult. If it's a child of poor parents then he/she should be taught that to have greed and to take something from others is a cause of one's own insult and humiliation and it's the characteristic of a dog that it keeps wagging its tail waiting and being greedy for a morsel [of food]. Similarly, the child should be made to dislike gold and silver and should be made to fear the love of these things worse than the love of snakes and scorpions. It's because the love and greed of gold and silver, causes far more damage to children and adults than the harms caused by poison [from snakes and scorpions].

ETIQUETTES OF GATHERINGS AND CONVERSATIONS

The child should be taught to not spit publicly, to not pick his/her nose, to not yawn in front of anyone, to not turn his/her back to anyone, to not sit cross-legged, to not sit while putting his/her palm under the chin or while supporting the head with hands because all these are indications of lethargy and laziness, in other words, the child should even be taught the proper manners of sitting. The child should be restrained from talking too much and it should be clearly impressed on his/her mind that all these are shameful things and are not the works of well-mannered children. Furthermore, the child should be completely prohibited from swearing either truly or falsely so that he/she will not develop the habit of swearing from childhood. Similarly, the child should be stopped from starting a conversation first and should have this habit instilled in him/her that he/she should speak only to answer [questions] and that too should be proportionate to the question [asked]. When someone is speaking to the child then he/she should listen very attentively and should get up to create more space for those who are older and then should sit with proper manners in front of them. The child should be stopped from useless (evil) talk, dirty talk, cursing, accusations, verbal abuse and should be prohibited from meeting people who do these things because the evil qualities of [one's] companions, necessarily influence the child [in a bad way]. And the real secret of [proper] training of children is embedded (hidden) in protecting the children from [the company of] bad companions.

PATIENCE AND FORBEARANCE

It is also necessary that when the teacher punishes the child then the child should neither scream nor shout nor seek the support of intercession (interference) of someone, instead, [the child] should exercise patience and forbearance. In order to make the child understand this, he/she should be told that to exercise patience is the way (characteristic) of the brave ones and to scream, shout, and cry are the works of those who lack dignity.

IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL EXERCISES

After finishing his/her studies, the child should be permitted to play some good sport, with the help of which, he/she could get rid of the tiredness from the school and to get relaxation. But the child should not be allowed to play so much so that he/she gets tired due to the play [itself]. Because, to completely stop the child from playing and to just keep him/her under the pressure of studies, makes his/her heart dead, makes his/her intelligence nullified and useless, and makes his/her life miserable, due to that, the child starts to look for excuses to get rid of the studies.

ETIQUETTES OF RESPECTING THE ELDERS

It's extremely important that the child should be taught the obedience to the parents, teachers, and everyone who is older in age than him/her whether this person is a relative or not. And he/she should be told to look at them with the eyes of respect and should abandon play in front of them. When the child reaches puberty, then he/she should not be allowed to have laziness in cleanliness (personal hygiene) and purity and should not be ignored for missing prayers. In certain days of [the holy month of] Ramadan, the child [before acquiring puberty] should be made to fast in some days and should be kept away from silk, and wearing gold and silver. As needed (as it's suitable according to the need), the child should be explained the limits (boundaries) and laws of the Islamic *Shari'ah* (Divine laws) and should be made to fear theft, unlawful earnings and food, breach of trust, dishonesty, shamelessness, and all evil things that are born in the temperament (personality) of the child during adolescence. When a child's upbringing from the [early] childhood will be like this, then by the time the child reaches puberty, he/she will be able to clearly understand the secrets and the wisdom behind these matters.

A GOOD THOUGHT ABOUT FOOD

During this stage (childhood/adolescence), he/she should be explained that whatever permissible (*Halal*) food is there, is also like medicines and the only purpose of them is that the human beings, after eating them, could be obedient to Allah, the Exalted.

IMPERMANENCE OF THE WORLD

It should also be clearly impressed upon the mind [of the child] that the world itself is not the purpose [of our lives], and [the world] is unreal, without permanence, and has an ending. Death puts an end to these [material] blessings and the world is only a place we are passing by. It is not a place of satisfaction and [is not] a place to settle. But the world of the hereafter is the real station of peace and tranquility and a place of stillness and satisfaction and the death, at all times, is in ambush, to end the life of the world.

WHO IS INTELLIGENT?

In reality, intelligent is the one who provides the capital of reliance (provision needed for one's journey to the hereafter) and good deeds from this mortal world for the eternal life of the hereafter, so that he/she attains a high rank of acceptance before Allah, the Exalted, and the limitless blessings of the Paradise. If the child's initial upbringing would have been good, then during adolescence, this discussion will prove to be pleasing to the self (*Nafs*), effective, get inscribed on the heart like an [indelible] inscription on the stone, auguring well for the child.

On contrary to that, if the child's mental development had been along the wrong lines, then the qualities of evil, shamelessness, desire for eating too much, greed for fine dresses, ostentation and ornamentation, gaudiness, arrogance and pride, would have been born in him/her, and his/her heart will refuse to accept this fact (i.e. the impermanence of the worldly life and the need to work for the life hereafter) like the dry wall refuses to accept dry soil (i.e. such teachings will not stick to the heart of the child). In summary, these are the initial matters that need to be taken care of to the utmost.

CHILD'S NATURE AND PARENTS' OBLIGATION

Since the composition of the child's heart is such that it can accept the influences of both the good and the bad, the righteous and the evil, it's the responsibility of the father and the mother to incline the [heart of the] child either to good or to evil (Imam Ghazali is not giving us a choice in this matter, but instead, urging us to incline the child towards good otherwise the child will automatically get inclined towards evil due to the parents' negligence). Prophet Muhammad (May peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) says:

"Kullu Mauludiy Yauladu 'Alal Fitrati Wa Innama Aabawahu Yuhawwidanihi Aow Yunassiranihi Aow Yumajjisanihi."

"Every child is born on the [true] nature [of God] but his/her parents make him/her either a Christian, Jew, or Magian."

A HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF THE BEST RESULTS OF GOOD UPBRINGING

Shaykh Suhail bin Abdullah Tusteri (May Allah Shower His Mercy upon him) says:

"When I was three years old, I used to get up at night to see the [heart-warming] spiritual view of the *Tahajjud* prayers [done in the last part of the night which is highly recommended in Islam for spiritual advancement on the Path of God] of my maternal uncle Muhammad bin Sawar (May Allah Shower His Mercy upon him). Once he said to me:

'Do you not engage in the remembrance of Allah, the Exalted, Who created you?'

I asked: 'How should I remember Allah?'

He said: 'At night, when you change your sides [on bed before sleeping], recite the following only in your heart, three times without moving your tongue:

Allahu Ma'iyā, Allahu Nazirun Ilaeyya, Allahu Shahidi
Allah is with me, Allah is watching me, Allah is in front of me.'

I did that for a few nights, and then I informed him about it to which he said:

'Now on every night, do the same thing seven times.'

I did that and informed him about that to which he said:

'Now do this eleven times.'

I did the same and as a result of that, I started to feel its taste and sweetness in my heart. Then when one year passed by acting on this [every night], he said:

'The remembrance that I have taught you, you should remember it well, and keep acting on that until you die. This will be a source of benefit to you in this world and in the next.'

I kept doing it for a couple of years, until I started to feel its taste (deep impact) in the deepest recesses of my innermost being. Then one day, he said:

'O Suhail! Allah, when He is with someone, whom He watches [every single moment], whom He is in front of, could that person ever disobey Allah, the Exalted? Beware! Never [ever] transgress against Allah and disobey Him!'

Therefore, I started to live in seclusion. Then he tried to send me to a school but I said:

'I feel the danger that my attention [towards Allah] will get divided. But it will be better, if you could get this commitment from the teacher that I will study with him for a while then I will quickly return to indulge in Allah's remembrance.'

Then afterwards, I went to the teacher and by the time I was six or seven years old, I memorized the entire Quran by heart. I always fasted and until I was twelve, the barley bread was my primary food (diet). During this time, when I was thirteen, I had this need to learn (find out) about a particular religious matter, and then I requested my family to allow me to go to Busra [in Iraq] so that I can ask the scholars there about this matter. Therefore, I came to Busra and asked scholars there about this matter but none of them satisfied me. Afterwards, I went to 'Abadan [in Iran] to be in the presence of Shaykh Habeeb Humza bin 'Abdullah 'Abadani (May Allah Shower His Mercy upon him) and asked him about the same religious matter to which he gave me a satisfactory response. Then I continued to stay in his presence for a long time to gain spiritual benefits (*Fayd*) from his [book] '*Mulfoozat al-Qudsiya*' and continued to learn manners from him. Then I returned to [my hometown of] Tuster and apportioned my diet so that one *Dirham*'s (an old currency) worth of barley used to be grounded for me and bread used to be prepared for me from it. Every night, at the time of *Suhoor* (Late night meal before starting the fast), I used to eat one *Aoqia* (an old unit of measure equivalent to one ounce today) from the bread without using any curry with it. Therefore, one *Dirham* [which is a very small amount] used to be sufficient for me for [the food for] the whole year.

I made progress [in this matter] to such an extent that I used to break my fasts after three nights (in other words, he used to fast continuously for three days and nights), then after five nights, then after seven nights, then I gradually reached up to twenty-five nights. I continued in this way for

twenty years continuously. Then I toured the world for many years and returned to Tuster. I used to worship and pray almost all night.”

Imam Ahmad (May Allah Shower His Mercy upon him) says:

“I never received any evidence that he (i.e. Shaykh Suhail Tusteri [May Allah Shower His Mercy upon him]) ever used curry [with his bread when he ate].”

[Imam Ghazali (May Allah Shower His Mercy upon him) did not mention this tradition so that we also raise our children like this in terms of the intense spiritual exercises and extraordinary feats of physical endurance that Shaykh Suhail (May Allah Shower His Mercy upon him) performed from his early childhood. Imam Ghazali’s purpose in mentioning this is to drive home the point that if proper arrangements are made by parents for the child’s proper upbringing, then the child can reach the pinnacle of human potential, otherwise, such intense spiritual and physical exercises is not necessary for all Muslims].