

Parenting Goals and Ideas

By Khalid Baig

"O Believers! Save Yourself and Your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones." [At-Tahreem, 66:6]

This verse points to the goal as well as the required seriousness of our efforts in bringing up our children. The central goal of their education and upbringing must be to prepare them for the future --- the Ultimate and Everlasting Future. One path leads to success there. It is the path of obedience to our Creator. We must protect them from taking any other path for all other paths lead to the blazing Hellfire. Our efforts must have the urgency they would have if we saw flames engulfing our children here.

While this is a universal command to believing parents everywhere, it assumes special importance for those living in non-Muslim societies for two principal reasons:

1. The pressures to assimilate from all societal organizations are just overwhelming. While schools and television remain the two most potent instruments for corrupting both the intellectual as well as the emotional space of the young minds, the popular culture and secular ideas invade from all possible directions.
2. The institutions that have been built so far to counter this tremendous force miss the target by a huge margin in numbers as well as quality. In the U.S., for example, there are 400 full time Islamic schools. While this looks like a big number, these schools can only accommodate about five percent of the Muslim student population. More than 95% will go to the government run secular schools. Moreover, even those going to the Islamic Schools are taught the same secular-humanist values and ideas that are dispensed by the public school system as no integrated Islamic curriculum exists today. The Islamic schools merely add Islamic studies, Arabic, and Qur'an to a secular curriculum that remains intact.

The results are devastating. Despite all the noise about Islam being the fastest growing religion (in the U.S./West/World), the Muslim children in Western countries are succumbing to the pressures at an alarming rate. Some openly renounce Islam. A large number develop doubts and misunderstandings about their religion. They seek compromises between Islam and un-Islam, or quietly

develop those compromises in their lives without telling their parents. The result is an epidemic of confusion, split personalities, arguments with parents, or rebellion.

While that should be the impetus for developing better Islamic Schools and other institutions, we should never lose sight of the fact that the biggest role in the upbringing of the children belongs to the parents. This verse says clearly that the responsibility for proper education and upbringing of the children lies squarely with the parents. This is a duty assigned to them by Allah and they will be held accountable for it.

As parents are we up to the task? Are we even clear about where we want to go and how to get there? Do we understand Islamic teachings about parenting and our responsibilities according to the Shariah? Sadly, the answer is no. Our goals as well as ideas about parenting show the same confusions that we are finding in the next generation about Islam. Here is a deeper look at some commonly held ideas and "truths" about parenting.

"Too much discipline will cause rebellion."

Too much discipline can certainly cause rebellion. So can too little. Muslim homes should be loving, caring homes where persuasion works most of the time. But when there is need for discipline, shying away from it can only exacerbate the problem. In the U.S., spanking a child by the parents is a no-no. Yet laws allow a thirteen year old to be treated as an adult (and held with adult criminals) in violent crime cases. Islam asks us to avoid both extremes. For example, we are asked to encourage the children to offer prayers from the age of seven. But they should be disciplined if they refuse to pray after age ten. Insufficient parental control can be as damaging as too much parental control.

"Outside influences do not matter if the home is good."

A good home is essential to proper upbringing. At the same time, we cannot be complacent about outside influences. Children, like budding plants, have to be protected from the harmful environment, whether it is friends, media, books, or whatever. It is not healthy to let the children be pulled in all different directions in the fallacious hopes that they will ultimately sort out things for themselves. That is a prescription for raising a "post-modern" person for whom, "Everything is O.K."

"It makes no difference if the mother stays home or works outside."

Children everywhere need the loving, nurturing presence of the mother. But, in immigrant Muslim communities, where other support facilities are often

missing or woefully inadequate, it makes a huge difference. Unfortunately, many mothers are reluctant to step up to their responsibility here. First, their own education did not prepare them for it, physically or psychologically. Second, there is a lot of self-generated economic pressure forcing women into the work force. Third, and most distressing, in many Muslim communities the working women enjoy a higher social status than the "mere housewives." Mothers should remember the hadith, that the mother is responsible for her children and will be held accountable for them. Those who belittle the task of homemaking are putting our next generations at extreme risk.

"Good scores mean good upbringing."

Good scores only mean that the student has absorbed the material that he was tested on very well. Whether that is good or bad depends upon the material itself. If a student obtained top grades in the seventh grade History in the U.S., for example, it does indicate a very high probability that he also swallowed --- hook, line and sinker --- all the lies and distortions in World history and History of Islam. Do not be surprised then, when he grows up a living question mark about Islam. As long as they are not being taught from an integrated Islamic curriculum, our blind emphasis on high scores in all subjects may be misplaced.

"Daughters and Sons: Islam demands equality."

Most certainly, Islam strictly forbids preferential treatment of boys or girls. But it is a gross misinterpretation of this command that Islam favors a unisex world. Men and women have different roles in life and our sons and daughters must be prepared for their respective roles.