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Fiqh of Hadith 1

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How to Build Character in Our Youth

Be mindful of Allah and Allah will protect you. Like a warm blanket, this concept surrounds you and make you feel safe and protected. A feeling all parents want for their children. Hadith number nineteen in Nawawi's book of 40 hadith provides the key to advice and guidance for anyone, but the lessons are particularly relevant to youth. The hadith begins, "Young man, I shall teach you some words..." What follows are words of important advice and guidance shared by the Prophet with Abu al-Abbas Abdullah ibn Abbaas . (Zarabozo) Al-Baitaar commented on this hadith by saying, "If one follows the advice the Prophet (PBUH) gave ibn Abbaas, he will find strength in this life and success in the Hereafter." (Zarabozo) This is certainly the goal. But, unlike Ibn Abbaas, our children do not have the Prophet (PBUH) as a tangible role model or the sahabah as their peers. So, how do we go about building character in today's Muslim youth? We need to be mindful of seven points, start young, work together, be consistent, be patient, be a role model, know your place and strike the right balance.

#1: Start young

"Young man, let me teach you some words." The Prophet (PBUH) chooses words with precision. Young is the word to begin this sentence and is the first piece of advice. Start advising your children at a young age, before the age of puberty. We can apply the approach to teaching the habit of praying to most of the important lessons for our youth. 'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas (may Allah be pleased with him), reports that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

"Instruct your children to pray when they are seven years old and smack them if they do not do it

when they are ten.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (495); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood (466). (Islamic Insights) Ibn Qudaamah said: This discipline is prescribed for the child in order to accustom him to prayer, so that he will feel comfortable with it and get used to it, and he will not neglect it when he reaches puberty, but it is not obligatory upon him. Al-Mughni, 1/682 (www.islamqa.com) “Around the age of five or six, children have developed a conscience – which is actually an internalized set of rules that you have taught them. Your regulations become her inner stop sign and will direct her.” (Psychology Today) Following a progressive pattern of adoption from a young age will serve our youth well and help them to inculcate the behaviors as part of their habits and character. In addition, starting young helps offer children and opportunity to practice what they are learning, while still at home with parental guidance.

#2: Work together

Islam has divided the upbringing of a child into three stages from birth to age 21. The division is based on the following hadith of the Prophet (PBUH): “The child is the master for seven years; and a slave for seven years and a vizier for seven years; so, if he grows into a good character within 21 years, well and good; otherwise leave him alone because you have discharged your responsibility before Allah.” (www.al-islam.org) During the first stage of development, the child interacts with their parents by listening to their instructions. Do this, don’t do that, be careful, watch that step, and so on. By seven, the child has a full command of language, his body and has started to develop into an individual. In the second stage, the child is watching for themselves, and not just you. They don’t want to be told, they want to be shown. Or, they want to watch and learn through their own devices. By the third stage, you have guided them and they have tried to guide themselves, and now they want to see if they can fly on their own. This is the stage during which you work more behind the scenes and indirectly. You watch

and guide, but more through the child's request than through helicopter parenting. Helping your child to know they can succeed on their own helps to instill confidence and assure, when on their own, they can carry on correctly.

#3: Be consistent

The Prophet ﷺ said, "The most beloved of deeds to Allah (SWT) are those that are most consistent, even if it is small." (Bukhari and Muslim). This hadith teaches us the importance of two concepts. One, the entire religion does not have to be taken on in one go. Just as with prayer, the various ibadaat, habits, rituals and obligations can be taken on over time. However, it is important to follow a pattern of learn, apply, maintain. In repeating acts consistently over time, they become part of our routine and will be executed without as much effort or burden.

Repetition helps ease the challenge of learning. "A baby needs 1,000 repetitions to learn a word; by the time he's a toddler, he might need 50 repetitions; and when he's in kindergarten, he may need only a few repetitions to master it because the brain connections have been laid out." (Today's Parent) Adults understand why consistency is important, but a child may find it boring or a burden. "The perception of children is very different from that of an adult. You cannot expect a child to grasp things or make logical decisions like you would. You may need to repeat something multiple times for the child to grasp it. It is only with patience and endurance that you and your child can understand each other. (childventures.ca)

#4: Be patient

Patience is an integral and respected component of the religion of Islam and its followers. In the Qur'an we learn, "Victory comes with patience..." (Qur'an 22:78) The gradual learning and adoption of Islam over 23 years helps reinforce the value of taking time to learn in order to do things correctly. Sahih Al-Bukhari – Book 70 Hadith 557 tells us "Nobody can be given a blessing better and greater than patience." And also Sahih Al-Bukhari – Book 24 Hadith 548

reveals, “Patience is one of the main characteristics by which Allah (SWT) tests mankind.” The Qur’an supports that notion, “And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to the patient ones. (Qur’an 2:155) Patience as understood by adults is a goal and a blessing. For kids, it can be torture. Slow is not the preferred pace of children. However, by starting young and being consistent in showing and teaching patience, there is a stronger chance a child becomes patient. Patience is a requirement of strong parenting. Showing patience helps the child learn patience, a valuable character trait. (childventures.ca) The reward of patience has also been made clear, as narrated Anas bin Malik: I heard Allah’s Apostle saying, “Allah said, ‘If I deprive my slave of his two beloved things (i.e., his eyes) and he remains patient, I will let him enter Paradise in compensation for them.’”

#5: Be a role model, find role models

Definition: A role model is a person who serves as an example by influencing others. (dictionary.com) We learn through the role of Hadith in the Qur’an the importance of modeling behavior through both the Prophet (PBUH) and the sahaba. “Children look up to a variety of role models to help shape how they behave in school, relationships, or when making difficult decisions. Negative role models, however, may also influence children.” (Yousset) As role models, parents must remember the child is always watching. They imitate the actions of their parents for better or worse. Parents must mind their manners, their words and their actions. Children also learn from their peers, so be careful the company they keep. The Prophet (PBUH) was reportedly asked: “Which of our companions are best?” He replied: “One whose appearance reminds you of God, and whose speech increases you in knowledge, and whose actions remind you of the hereafter.” (Bukhari, Muslim). If you want your child to be respectful, treat him, your family, and the neighbors respectfully. (He is watching.) If you want him to be honest, never lie to him. If you want him to be responsible for his actions and apologize, then you must apologize

to him when you make a mistake. If you say please and thank you, he will be polite. Your child loves you, so he will identify with you and behave as you do. Your ideas will become his and guide his behavior. (psychologytoday.com)

#6: Know your place

The Prophet (PBUH) said, “If you ask, ask of Allah (SWT). If you seek help, seek help with Allah (SWT).” Parents must always understand their place. While it may seem at times to both the parent and the child, we must always remember that, in reality, it is only ever Allah (SWT) who rules. Parents are here to guide, children to learn. Parents have the gift of the religion of Islam to explain life’s rules, regulations, obligations and benefits. They come from something beyond creation, beyond the parent. The child can learn and explore the relationship with the Allah (SWT) beyond the boundaries set by parents. All we do and all we share comes from Allah. The more children understand parents are just conveying the message, the more children will understand their parents are fallible and that we turn to Allah (SWT) not creation for answers. Parents must help the child build up trust in Allah (SWT). The Prophet said, “Be mindful of Allah (SWT), and you will find him in front of you.” The Qur’an confirms this notion, “You alone we worship and in You (alone) we seek help” (Qur’an Surah Fatiha)

#7: Strike the right balance

There is striving in this life for the reward of the akhirah. Parents must strive to instill in their child the need for balance. While we live immersed in the dunia, it cannot overtake the scale, it must be weighed back to center with the obligations to attain the akhirah. These days, kids live an 80/20 existence. In seven-eight hour days, kids spend about 4-6 hours in weekend school and maybe a few more during the week reading Qur’an and praying. By contrast they spend 8-12 hours a day going to secular school and studying subjects to attain the all-important professional career. Children are pressed to high achievement at school, but just expected to

attend weekend school. Some households strive for a hafid among their offspring, but not a fluent Arabic speaking hafid who understands the tafseer of the words memorized, rather a child who by rote memorization crammed the Qur'an down in two to four years. Manners and akhlak are overshadowed by the colloquialisms of day to day life. The masjid is for Fridays and Ramadan. This is not balance. Once mature, kids are expected to embrace the requirements of Islam, but they often lack the love and understanding required to make that a loving embrace.

There is a temptation to force this balance, once an imbalance is perceived, by cutting off all distractions, such as screens, phones, and movies. "Adults often complain that teens look at their devices too much. But according to a 2017 study by Common Sense Media, adults spend 26 minutes longer each day "with screen media" than children ages 8-18 (and more than 80 per cent of it is "devoted to personal screen media"). Kids can't be what they can't see. By teaching kids to use social media in a healthy way, parents can help them take charge of their online reputation and follow positive role models who can push them toward their goals." (Tierney) Let's empower our kids to fuel their potential by using social media responsibly and for reasonable periods of time because they understand the value of doing so and have been involved in the decision making. Yes, banning social media altogether would be easier — for you. Your child, however, would miss out.

Children are an amanah for their parents, both a test and a blessing. They do not care for themselves, so parents must take thoughtful and proactive steps, in order to guide them to become devoted Muslims of good character with love of Allah (SWT) and his Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) said, "A virtuous child is a flower from the flowers of paradise." May Allah protect our children and keep them on the straight path. Allahu allam.

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