

Motherhood (Caring for Children)

One of the important duties of women is caring for their children. This is not an easy task but one which is very sensitive and vital. It is the most sacred and most valuable responsibility which has been bestowed upon women by the order of creation. There are a few points which are briefly mentioned here with regard to this matter:

(1) Fruit of Marriage

Although a man and a woman get married for a few reasons such as sexual motive, love, etc, having a child is not one of the main reasons for marriage. But it is not long before the true motive of natural creation becomes apparent itself and the love for having a child grows in their hearts. The existence of a child is the fruit of the marital tree and a natural desire of men and women. A marriage without a child is like a fruit less tree. A child would strengthen the bonds of love between a couple. It serves as a drive to the man's working life and encourages the parents to care for their family.

Marriage is sometimes initially founded on the basis of lust, love making and instantaneous sexual interests. Such a foundation is false and not lasting and is always prone to destruction. The factor with which this foundation becomes strong, is having a child. Lust and sexual drive soon subside. The only memory from days and nights of sexual desire would be the children, whose existence would be heart warming to the parents.

"Imam Sajjad (AS) stated:

'One's happiness is in having pious children from whom one can seek help'."

"The Prophet (SA) of Allah stated:

'A pious child is as sweet-smelling plant from among the plants of Paradise'. "

"The Prophet (SA) of Allah also stated:

'Add to the numbers of your children, because I, on the Day of Judgement, will feel honoured about the greatness of your numbers over the other Ummahs'."

How ignorant are those who, with various excuses, refuse to have children, and thus fight the principle of creation!

(2) Educating a Child

The most sensitive responsibility of a mother is her duty to educate and train her children. Although both the parents should share this responsibility, it weighs more heavily on the shoulders of mothers. This is because a mother is able to constantly protect and monitor her child. If mothers, through a correct programme try to bring up their children, then a whole nation and even the world would undergo revolutionary changes. Thus the progress or deterioration of a society is in the hands of women.

"The Prophet (SA) of Allah stated: 'The Paradise is under the feet of mothers'."

Small children of today are the men and women of tomorrow. Whatever lessons they learn now, they will practise in future societies. If families improve, the society will progress, because societies are no more than a collection of families. Tomorrow's world will suffer with today's bad, tempered, stubborn, ignorant, cowardly, materialistic, nasty, careless, selfish and cruel children. On the contrary, tomorrow's world will benefit from today's children who are honest, well-mannered, generous, brave, just, trustworthy, etc.

Therefore, parents in general and mothers in particular are responsible towards their societies. They can serve their society by bringing up pious children. On the other hand, carelessness about their responsibility will be questioned on the Day of Judgement.

"Imam Sajjad (AS) stated:

'The right of your child is that you should know he is from you. Be it good or bad he is related to you. You are responsible for his upbringing, education and showing him the path to Allah and helping him to be obedient. You should treat him in such a way that if you behave well towards him, you will be sure of being rewarded and if you behave badly towards him, you will be sure of receiving punishment'. "

Of course not all mothers are aware of the necessary skills of training a child and that is why they should set about learning them. It is not within the scope of this book to present you with a detailed discussion on caring for one's child. Fortunately, there are many books, which have been written on this subject by learned writers and scholars. Women can buy these books and with the help of their own experience, they can educate their children and even become specialists in the field of child-rearing. She can then become helpful to other mothers for their duties regarding their children.

Here one point should be mentioned. Many people make mistakes over the two phrases of 'education' and 'training', or think of them as having the same meaning. But one should know that teaching a child different subjects such as appropriate stories, poems, Qur'an, traditions of the Prophet (SA), and the Imams (AS) does not educate them. Such subjects are useful but a child should not only learn about honest persons, but he should be honest himself.

Thus, we must create such an atmosphere and living environment that the child would naturally become an honest and pious person. If a child grows up in an environment of honesty, truthfulness, bravery, discipline, cleanliness, kindness, love, freedom, justice, patience, trustworthiness, faithfulness, and sacrifice, then he learns all of that. On the other hand, a child who grows up in a place of corruption, deception, anger, hate, hypocrisy, filth, and disloyalty, would inevitably be affected by them. Such a child may learn many stories about good and pious people, but to no avail. Dishonest parents cannot, by teaching Qur'an and Hadith, bring up honest children. Dirty mother and father actually teach their child to be dirty. A child pays more attention to his parent's deeds and not so much to their words.

Therefore, those of us who are seriously thinking of bringing up honest and good children, should correct their own behaviour first. This is the only way to educate a child to be useful to himself and his society.

Nutrition and Hygiene

Another important duty of a housewife is feeding her child (ren). Health or illness, beauty or ugliness, even good or bad temperedness, and cleverness of children are all related to the way they are fed. .

Children have a different feeding pattern as compared with that of adults. They have different requirements at different ages and therefore mothers have to take this point into consideration when feeding their children.

The best and the most nourishing food is milk. Milk contains all that is required for a healthy body. Thus for a baby there is nothing more suitable than the mother's milk. Since milk contains ingredients which are suitable for the baby's digestive system, therefore, there are not any problems in feeding a baby with mother's milk. Besides one does not need to boil it, pasteurize it, or sterilize it. One also need not worry ~bout its genuineness.

"Imam 'Ali (AS) stated:

'There is no better and more copious food than mother's milk for a baby'."

"Dr A H Taba, the former Head of the Eastern Mediterranean Region of the World Health Organization said:

'One of the important factors, which makes a child susceptible to many illnesses is by depriving him or her of mother's milk which is the only life insurance of any person'.

Thus, mothers who feed their babies with their own milk must remember that all the necessary nutrition for their babies are contained within that milk.

But a nutritive milk is only possible if the mother is fed well, that is, the quality of her milk is related to the quality and quantity of her own food. The better her food, the better her milk would be. Mothers who feed their babies with their own milk can, through carelessness about their food, damage their own health as well as of their babies.

The fathers of small babies are also responsible to supply their wives with sufficient good quality food. Malnutrition is a serious problem for many people and one should not overlook it or else she must be prepared to pay for the treatment of illnesses caused by it.

You can obtain enough information on this subject from your doctor or related books. But as a general rule a nursing mother should consume all types of food from meat, fruit, dairy products... to vegetables.

The important fact is that the mother's milk affects the baby's character and that is why

"Imam' An (AS) stated:

'Do not choose foolish women to feed (your children) with their milk, because the milk makes their base qualities penetrated into the child'."

"Imim Biqir (AS) stated:

'Choose noble women to feed (your children) with their milk, because the base qualities of milk are passed from the feeding woman to the child'."

You must feed your baby at definite intervals. Your child gets used to this regularity and helps him in being patient. It also helps him with regard to a healthy digestive system and stomach. On the other hand, if you feed the baby whenever he cries, then he will not learn to be disciplined. If he gets what he wants through crying, then he will pick up this attitude and use it even when he becomes an adult. He will not have the necessary patience when confronting hardships. He will either use force to achieve his own wishes or he will break down under difficulties.

Do not think that to discipline a child is an impossible task. You must just be patient and have a suitable programme for training him according to your standards. The child nutritive experts say that a baby must be fed with milk once every three to four hours.

Hold your child in your arms while feeding. By embracing the child feels your love and it would even affect his/her future personality. Do not feed the baby while lying down, because it has been seen that some mothers have fallen asleep while feeding their babies and as a result some babies have suffocated because their mother's breasts prevented them breathing. If you do not have any milk yourself, you can use cow's milk. But since cow's milk is much denser than mother's milk, you must add some water to it. You can also use pasteurized milk, which you should boil for twenty minutes or until it becomes safe for babies' consumption.

Do not feed the baby with hot or cold milk, but at the same temperature as the mother's milk. After every feeding, you should boil the bottle and its nipple, and extra care must be taken during the hot seasons. Be careful not to use leftover or sour milk. It is better to measure the amount of milk for every feeding in order to make sure that your child is not getting too much or too little. In using powdered milk, you should consult a pediatrician. You must always use fresh powdered milk.

After the fourth month of the baby's birth you can start to feed him with fruit juice. From the age of six months, you can also start to feed him with solid foods and soups. You can feed him biscuits or sweet bread. Yogurt and cheese are also useful. You can gradually feed him with slight amounts of your own food.

Remember that your baby feels thirsty just as often as you do. Therefore, feed him with water as well, but do not try to make him drink tea or coffee. Fruits, vegetables, and soups are especially useful for growing infants.

Do not forget to be hygienic with regard to your baby's bedding, clothing, and nappies. Wash his face and hands often. Bathe him regularly, because infants are very susceptible towards dirt and germs and become ill easily.

You must vaccinate your children against such diseases as smallpox, chickenpox, whooping cough, infantile paralysis, scarlet fever, measles, and diphtheria. Vaccines are fortunately readily available in medical and health centres.

You can have healthy children by observing these codes of hygiene and cleanliness