

## INTEGRATING ISLAM INTO LIFE

One of the most important aspects of raising your children to be Muslims is to introduce the idea that Allah is also happy with their good actions. If you say that what they did or are doing is making you and Allah happy, then the child begins to associate good behavior with acting for the pleasure of Allah, which in a nutshell, is exactly what being a good Muslim involves. Can you say anything better of a believer other than that he/she does everything *fi sabillah* (for the sake of Allah)?

## BAD CHILDREN

The child who errs is forgiven by Allah, and if he dies in childhood, he automatically goes to heaven. This mercy of Allah should guide us as we guide our children. It is not necessary to make the child fearful of Allah or fearful of going to hell. In fact, this approach is counter productive - it often achieves the very result we are trying to avoid. **Stressing the negative and the punishment makes the child want to avoid anything to do with the religion. He or she grows up thinking that it is religion that keeps him from enjoying life.**

## ATTRIBUTES OF ALLAH

When you are talking to children under the age of twelve, stress the characteristics of Allah that will give him security and assurances as he grows and encounters fearful situations and unknowns. He needs to be aware of the many blessings Allah has given to him to help him enjoy and cope with his life. **And he needs to understand which actions Allah will be pleased with, rather than worry over punishment for mistakes he knows he will make.**

## ISLAM AND DAILY LIFE

Too often when parents think about talking to their children about Islam, they concentrate on the ritual of the five pillars. They teach them how to make salat (required prayer), and they teach them some short Qur'anic surat (chapters). These are important, but don't forget that Islam is a total way of life, and every aspect has an Islamic element that you need to talk about and demonstrate for your child. When the father goes off to work, the mother can say 'Good bye' or she can say 'Assalamu alaikum' and add its meaning in English, 'may Allah's peace be with you'. As she and the young child start to do something together, she can mention that the father is doing what Allah says a good father should do - working to take care of the family. She can also mention, and the father should also mention it frequently, that she is trying to please Allah by doing many things to help her child and the family. When the child helps her mother clean off the table, the mother should mention that Allah is pleased with children who help their parents. Mentioning the Islamic aspect does not imply nor suggest that you need to deliver lectures about Islam to your child. No child wants to sit still long enough to hear a lecture about anything. The effective teaching comes as short comments or stories that point out the Islamic nature of the action. When the parents pay zakat (yearly compulsory tax), they should mention the fact to their children. When they visit the sick, they should quote a Qur'anic ayah (verse) or hadith (story about Prophet Muhammad) which indicates that this action pleases Allah. When there are two ways that a child can respond to a situation, the parent can mention nicely which way will be pleasing to Allah.

The constant reference to Allah, the constant encouragement to do what is right, and the constant praise and positive reinforcement for doing the right actions, will focus your child on the right path.

## **ADOLESCENCE**

As our children reach adolescence, they begin to question what they have been taught, especially if most of the youth they associate with are non-Muslims, or non-practicing Muslims.

If you have already established a positive relationship with your youth, then your teenage child will come to you with his/her questions and concerns. **Do not mistake these questions and worries as a rebellion against you or against their religion.** They see the kids at school dating, and it looks like fun. 'Why shouldn't we date?' they wonder. Be happy that your youth feels comfortable coming to you with these issues.

If you have not established a positive relationship with your child by this time, you will probably have a big problem on your hands, because your youth will have the same questions, but he won't come to you for a discussion about them. He will be seeking his answers from his friends, and if his friends are not actively practicing Muslims, he may be getting answers that go against Islam.

**Why do some parents and youth have a positive relationship and others do not?** There are at least two important factors here: time and what kind of time? Did the parents spend time with their children as they were growing up? Did they make a practice of asking their children about their school, their friends, their opinions on various things, and then LISTEN to their answers?