

Shaping Islamic Education to Build Muslim Youth for the Challenges of 21st Century Life

3. Understanding the True Purpose of Life and How to be the Slave of Allah

The liberal way of life, which dominates societies today, promotes the view that the purpose of life is to pursue one's desires and the pleasures and material gains of this world. The criterion by which good is distinguished from bad is the material benefit that the action brings to the individual's life and whether it aids him in fulfilling his worldly desires, ambitions or interests. Its philosophy is therefore encouraging people to become slaves to their desires, such that their whims become the basis by which they decide how to live their lives or organize their societies. This liberal ideal is one that constantly surrounds all of us, including young Muslims and needs to be countered.

One of the key concepts therefore that needs to be built in Muslim children is that it is not enough just to believe in the truth of Islam and be a Muslim, or to follow a few Islamic duties. Rather, belief in the Islamic Aqeedah and to be amongst the People of Paradise, necessitates us to strive to be the 'Slaves of Allah' and not slaves of our desires. This should be the vision that we present to our children as the ultimate goal in life. The first step in achieving this is to ensure that our youth understand clearly, why Allah (swt) has created us and what He (swt) therefore defines as the true purpose of life. Allah (swt) says,

﴿الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

"He (is the one) who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed." [al-Mulk: 2]

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

"I have not created man and jinn except as a worship unto me." [Adh-Dhariyat: 56]

If this point is understood and appreciated clearly - that the purpose of life is to worship Allah (swt), and that the very reason for our existence is simply a test to establish which of us is best in deeds to decide if we are to be given Jannah or Jahannum - then it will Insha Allah diminish the importance and dazzle of the material things in this life that may keep our children from abiding by the Commands of Allah (swt). In addition, it will elevate the importance of the Hereafter in their eyes, and the seriousness of always striving for Paradise, alongside always being conscious of avoiding the Hellfire.

However, to explain this concept correctly, requires for us to convey accurately what 'worship of Allah (swt)' actually comprises and entails. It needs to be understood, that fulfilling our life's purpose of worshipping Allah (swt) is more than just abiding by a few Islamic obligations and regulations. Rather it necessitates for us to leave our desires and personal opinions aside, and submit in obedience to His (swt)'s EVERY Command, and base each one of our actions, viewpoints, and judgements upon His (swt)'s Laws and Limits alone. Allah (swt) says,

﴿قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ﴾

"Say (O Muhammad (saw)): Verily, I am commanded to worship Allah by obeying and doing righteous deeds for His sake only." [Az-Zumar: 11]

﴿فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا﴾

"But no, by your Lord, they will not [truly] believe until they make you, [O Muhammad], judge in all disputes between them, and then find within themselves no resistance against your decision, and submit in [full, willing] submission." [An-Nisa: 65]

According to this, we need to make our children understand that every single action they perform - no matter how small they make - consider it will have a consequence in the Hereafter of reward or punishment. They will be judged by Allah (swt) for it, without any doubt, for Allah (swt) says,

﴿وَنَضَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ فَلَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَإِنْ كَانَ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِّنْ خَرْدَلٍ أَتَيْنَا بِهَا وَكَفَىٰ بِنَا حَاسِبِينَ﴾

“And We shall set up scales on the Day of Judgement, so that no man shall in the least be wronged. Actions as small as a grain of mustard seed shall be weighed out. Sufficient are We to take account.” [Al-Anbiya: 47]

﴿إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا * وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا * وَقَالَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا * يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا * بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا * يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصُدُّرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ * فَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ * وَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ﴾

“When the earth is shaken to her utmost convulsion, and the earth throws out its burdens, and mankind says: 'What is the matter with it?' On that Day it will relate its news, that your Lord has inspired it. On that Day mankind shall issue in scatterings to see their deeds. Whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoever has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.” [Al-Zalzala]

Hence, they should comprehend clearly that they will be accountable for every deed they do. Therefore, before performing any action, or forming an opinion or making a judgement on any matter – be it in their ibaadah, how they dress, on family issues, in money matters, in interacting with the opposite sex, in politics and beyond - they must first refer to the Qur'an and Sunnah – to understand Islam's view on the matter and whether it accepts or rejects it. Appreciating this point will Insha Allah help to make Islam, not just part of their life but encompass the whole of their life, as should be the case for the one who wishes to be the 'Slave of Allah'. It will make Islam the lens through which they view everything in the world. And Insha Allah it will raise God-Conscious Muslim youth who are aware of Allah (swt) with every step that they take. Hence, they will be of those who live by their Deen completely: fulfilling all their Islamic obligations, and carrying the concept of abiding by the Halal and Haram in all situations. Allah (swt) says,

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَآفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ﴾

“O you who believe! Enter into Islam completely [and perfectly] and do not follow the footsteps of Shaytan; surely he is your open enemy.” [Al-Baqara: 208]

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَن يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلًّا مُّبِينًا﴾

“It is not fitting for a believer whether male or female, when Allah and his messenger have decided on a matter to have any dispute in the decision but to submit with the fullest of submission, if any disobeys Allah and His messenger, he is clearly on a wrong path.” [Al-Ahzab:36]

The great classical scholar Ibn Taymiyyah (rm) wrote a book entitled, 'Al-Ubudiyyah': Being a True Slave of Allah'. He describes various qualities which define the one who is a 'Slave to Allah (swt)' which include the following 3 important characteristics:

1. **Unconditional Obedience to Allah (swt)**. This entails putting our desires aside for what pleases Him (swt) and performing His (swt)'s Command – whether it's doing our prayers consistently, or wearing the Khimar and Jilbab, or carrying the dawah, or accounting the ruler, or any other Islamic duty - no matter the difficulties we may face or consequences on our personal ambitions or interests or wealth or lives. It's having no excuses for disobedience. Allah (swt) says,

﴿إِنَّمَا كَانَ قَوْلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذَا دُعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ يَقُولُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ﴾

“The only statement of the (true) believers when they are called to Allah and His Messenger to judge between them is that they say, “We hear and we obey”. And those are the successful.” [Al-Nur: 51]

2. **Loving Allah (swt) more than anything or anyone else.** This means not letting anything or anyone we love keep us away from obeying and pleasing Allah (swt), whether it's our family, our friends, our wealth, our job, our ambitions, our status, and even our own lives. It also includes shaping what we love and hate, what we view as beautiful and ugly, and what we judge as just and unjust in accordance to what Allah (swt) has ordained and not in accordance to what society tells us. And so when some say that the Khimar, or the Islamic edicts on inheritance, polygamy, adultery, apostasy, rights and duties in marriage, Jihad, ruling and other matters are unjust, uncivilized, and barbaric, we reject such accusations. Rather we love these laws for they are from Allah (swt) Who is dearer to us than anything in this life. Allah (swt) says,

﴿قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ وَأَمْوَالٌ اقْتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِينُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ مِّنْ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ﴾

“Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that you have gained; the commerce in which you fear a decline; or the dwellings in which you delight – are dearer to you than Allah, or His Messenger, or the striving in His Cause – then wait until Allah brings about His Decision: and Allah does not guide the transgressing people.” [At-Taubah: 24]

3. **Appreciating the relationship of Master and slave between Allah (swt) and ourselves.** This is to understand that He (swt) alone has the right to define what's right and wrong, the limits and regulations in every matter, and what constitutes worship to Him (swt). It is understanding that He alone is the Legislator and Sovereign over all matters, and should be the source of all laws for mankind – as individuals and as societies. This means therefore accepting that we have no right to define how to be a good Muslim from our own whims – as those who seek to reform Islam do; or how to organize the affairs of humanity or rule a state from our own minds – as those who advocate Democracy do - for this is the prerogative of Allah (swt) alone. Allah (swt) says,

﴿ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

“We made for you a law, so follow it, and follow not the whims of those who have no knowledge.” [Al-Jathiya: 18]

﴿إِنِ اتَّخَذْتُمُ إِلَّا اللَّهَ أَمْرًا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

“The command is for none but Allah. He has commanded that you worship none but Him. This is the right religion, but most men know not.” [Yusuf: 40]

In conclusion, it is important to build the understanding within our Muslim children that being a 'slave to Allah (swt)' is not just something that we just express on our prayer mats or in the mosque or during Ramadan. It's about who we are. It should be our whole identity as a Muslim which is part of us at all times, no matter what we are doing or where we are. And when we adopt this identity, pleasing Allah (swt) becomes the most important goal in our lives, over everything else.

﴿قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

“Say: "Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.” [Al-An'am: 162]

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