

TAKING YOU THROUGH THE STAGES OF CHILDHOOD

By Tahera Kassamali

The life of a human being passes through two main phases. The first phase is childhood, from birth to twenty one years. This phase is divided into three stages of seven years each. The second phase of adulthood is from twenty one years to the end of life. This phase consists of young adulthood, mature adulthood (when a human being is at the peak of all his faculties), and old age.

The character and personality of the human being are essentially formed during the stages of childhood. The characteristics that he acquires will stay with him all his life. It is with great difficulty that an adult can change the traits and habits acquired in childhood. That is why Islam lays a lot of importance on correct training during this stage.

Training during the phase of childhood, according to Imam Ali (as), is like carving on a stone. It remains forever, and the fruits of it – both good and bad – can be seen as the child grows. The training done during the first three stages is an obligatory duty on parents. It is the right of the child that he receives this training, even if he is not too inclined to it. When this right is fulfilled correctly by the parents, the result is usually a righteous child. If that is not the case despite the efforts of the parents, then the parents are not responsible and are not guilty in the eyes of God.

Many hadith talk about the stages of

Salaam Alaykum.

The Muslim Mums team has been inspired by the life of Sayyeda Zainab and her great ability, intelligence, knowledge, insight, courage and perseverance. To honour the wiladat of this great lady, this issue has taken an education focus. It was her words that spread the story of Kerbala, her knowledge that raised interest in the Ahlul Bayt and her character that brought about majalis which have lived through the centuries. As it is said, "the word is mightier than the sword", this should stay in the minds of all Muslims, particularly the women. They should realise that they can always make a difference and reach for the better.

The team: Fatema Gulamhussein, Fatema Haji, Sakina Kermalli, Farhanaz Merali, Mariam Merali & Shaheen Merali

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childhood, and the duties of parents at each stage. These hadith should be understood properly and applied appropriately. Sometimes a misunderstanding of the hadith results either in a rejection of it, or an extreme application.

The Holy Prophet (a) has said: A child is a master for seven years, a servant for seven years, and a deputy for seven years.

Another hadith of Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (a) says: A child plays for seven years, learns for seven years, and becomes aware of halal and haram for seven years.

Some hadith mention the age of seven as the age when real learning should begin. The Holy Prophet (s) says: Order your children to say their prayers when they are seven, and punish them when they are ten [if they don't say their prayers], and separate them in their beds.

Imam Husayn (a) says: We command our children to fast when they are seven, whatever they can fast from the day.

The First Seven Years

When a child is master for the first seven years, it does not mean that he should always be allowed to do whatever he wants. What it means is that parents need to understand that the child is acting on his fitrat (instinct). What he wants most is the love of parents and to have fun. Whatever he should learn at that age should be through play, not serious learning. It is a stage when there is a lot of informal training without the child realizing that he is being trained. He thus becomes a willing partner and learns with enjoyment.

Parents learn a lot about their child in the first seven years. They recognize his nature, his temperament, his likes and dislikes, his way of thinking, etc. This will help them train him in the correct way and predict ways in which he could go wrong. Once parents recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their

child they can plan to train him accordingly. They can work with his strengths and enhance them, and help him overcome his weaknesses.

Without recognition of each individual child and their unique personality, it is very easy for parents to make the mistake of bringing up all their children in the manner which they think right, without considering individual differences or catering for specific weaknesses.

Just as parents get to know their child during this stage, the child also learns to know and understand his parents. He figures out how he can get them to do what he wants, and how he can get away with things. He learns how to get their attention, and how to affect them. Thus the first seven years set a foundation for the relationship between parents and children.

Dr. Ali Qaemi in his book *Khanwadeh wa Niyazmandihaye Kudakan* (The Family and the Needs of Children) writes that the child during the first seven years has the following unique traits:

1) Desire for Fun and Pleasure

A child during this stage strives for pleasure. He likes to play, laugh, have fun, do as he desires, avert grief from himself, and remove any

obstacle that comes in the way of his having a good time. He works to achieve this pleasure, prepares for it, sometimes disobeys for it, and is often stubborn and naughty. Efforts to discipline and restrain are met with resistance. That is why it is necessary for a parent to channel the child's pleasures into what is acceptable and right. Informal training and subtle discipline are done through the medium of fun and games. Story telling is a good method of informal teaching during this time. It gives pleasure to the child and he unconsciously absorbs the lessons that may be part of the story.

2) Love of Play

Islam emphasizes the need for play in the life of a child. A human being needs activity and movement in daily life, especially a child. A child learns many things through play. He learns about himself and the world around him, develops his skills and senses, learns to cooperate and deals with others.

Through play a child experiences different emotions such as happiness, anger, frustration, disappointment, excitement, etc. He learns to deal with these emotions and channel them correctly. Playing gives the child joy and he is willing to play even when he is tired. Few parents have to force a child to play. The positive effects of play are subtle,



without the child feeling that he has to learn, with no resistance or opposition.

During the first seven years the parent should be a partner in play. The Holy Prophet (s) used to play with his grandchildren, and pretend to be a camel while they sat on his back. As he rode with them through the streets, people would come up and tell Imam Hasan(a) and Husayn (a): 'What a great ride for you!' And the Prophet (s) would say: 'And what great riders they are'. The status of the Prophet did not prevent him from playing and going along with childish play. He has said: Whoever has a child should act like a child with him.

Systematic learning is not to be done in the first seven years. A child may be able to absorb the learning and know things fast, but it is possible that this will have effect later on. It can lead to an inability to enjoy life, increased frustration, repressed anger, weak bonds with the family, aversion to learning, etc. Children need to be allowed to be children. When we push them, and expect a lot from them, they may try hard to please us but this will not be without consequences. Most of the informal training that comes at this stage should come from the parents. Islamic teachings on children prefer the home to formal schooling during this stage, emphasizing the fact that the mother is the best and most effective teacher for the child.

3) Ability to Imitate

Children during this stage love to imitate others around them. Thus a young child will pray with the mother, try to recite Quran and duas, do matam at mosque, etc. This is a natural urge - to copy those around him. Many habits are formed in this way. That is why it is important for parents to be good role models, showing habits which the child can imitate. It is also important for parents to be aware of outside influences which the child may try to copy, especially characters on



television and film. Constant exposure to these characters may result in the imitation of undesirable behavior.

4) Limited perceptions

The child during this stage, especially the first three years, is very limited in his understanding and perception. Everything is understood through his outer senses and he learns about the world around him through his eyes, ears, sense of touch, etc. He does not have a deeper understanding of things as adults do. His power of thinking, concluding, problem solving, concept of time, are all very limited. Even when he learns new concepts it takes time before he can apply them generally. A child during this stage cannot differentiate between right and wrong and is prone to test things for himself.

5) Questioning and Exploring

A child during this stage, especially after the first three years, is extremely curious. He has lots of

questions and demands answers. This is not through an understanding of the importance of knowledge, but just to satisfy the inherent curiosity and thirst for awareness that is part of human nature. It is necessary to answer the questions, and more importantly to answer them according to the age of the child.

As the child reaches the end of the first stage, certain changes now need to take place in preparation for the second stage. The child has to abide by appropriate behavior and has to understand that there are consequences for inappropriate behavior. He begins to perform wajibaat like Salaat and fasting. A certain type of behavior is now expected from him. It is a gradual control which slowly becomes stronger as the child gets older. It is also preparation for the second stage where the child will have to learn to obey rules and follow orders. His position will now change from the master to the obedient follower, or servant.



GROWING FEET

Providing parents with “Pearls of Wisdom” (Islamic and Secular) through the growing years

PREGNANCY – The Expectant Father (Based on Conception, Pregnancy and Birth, By Dr. Miriam Stoppard)

Finding out you are going to be a father is one of the most exciting moments of your life. The emotional impact of the news will be just as strong on you as it is on your partner. However, the effect on men is often underestimated and you are likely to find that once the initial excitement has worn off, people will stop asking you how you are feeling. It's therefore important to talk about your emotions, especially to your wife, and to get involved in the pregnancy and birth plans. Allow the unborn baby to be as big a part of your life as you can – this, after all, is something that is happening to both of you, not just to your wife. This will be covered in 3 parts

inshallah.

Part 1: Understanding Your Emotions

The pregnancy may not seem real for the first couple of months – not least because your wife will look much the same. Don't worry if you feel differently about the pregnancy from her; it is an internal experience for her and an external one for you, and a couple doesn't suddenly become one person with one set of feelings just because they are having a baby together. However, once you see that your partner's body has begun to change and later, when you have felt the baby move, the idea of having a baby will become more real. It is at this time that your feelings of joy and excitement may be replaced by fears and worries; whatever your family set-up, it is normal for a man to begin to worry

about being able to provide for his family. Having a child can be an extra financial burden, especially if your wife is going to give up her job, but don't rush into life-changing decisions, such as getting a new job or seeking promotion. It's difficult to know whether you'll want extra responsibility a year down the line, once you're a parent. Remember, as a father you have more than just material possessions to offer your child.

INFANCY (0-12 Months) – Salt Intake (Based on What to Expect in the First Year, by Murkoff, Eisenberg and Hathaway)

Infants, like all of us, do need some salt. But also like the rest of us, they don't need a lot of it. In fact, their kidneys can't handle large amounts of sodium, which is probably why breast milk is a very low sodium drink. And there is some evidence that too much salt too soon, especially when there is a family history of hypertension, can set the stage for high blood pressure in adulthood. A high-sodium diet early in life can also nurture a lifelong taste for the salty stuff. Major manufacturers have eliminated salt from their baby food recipes. Parents who prepare their own baby foods should do likewise. Don't assume that runner beans or mashed potatoes won't appeal to your child unless they've been sprinkled with salt just because you like them that way. Give her taste buds a chance to learn what foods taste like unsalted, and she'll develop a healthy preference that'll last a lifetime.

THE TODDLER YEARS – Keeping Your Cool

Nobody is cool, calm and collected all of the time – particularly when there's a toddler in the house. But since frequent parental tantrums are not good for you or your toddler, it's a good idea to try some simple strategies to help minimise the possibility of such explosions. These will be covered over four issues, Inshallah.

Part 4:

From an Islamic perspective, the following things are recommended when you feel you're about to boil over.

1. Change your position. If one is angry whilst standing, he should sit and if he is angered whilst sitting then he should stand up or sleep. Abu Dhar al-Ghifari has reported from the Holy Prophet (saww), "If any man becomes angry while standing, he should sit down – if the anger persists then he should lie down". (Al-Targheeb Wal-Tarheeb). It is also reported from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as), "If a person becomes angry while standing, he must sit. This way the filth of Shaytan will come off him. And if he is sitting then he must stand up..." (Bihar al-Anwaar)
2. Perform Wudhoo. Islam teaches us to perform Wudhoo during anger. Look at the philosophy that has been explained for this. The Holy Prophet (saww) has said, "Verily Anger is from Shaytan and Shaytan is created from fire. Fire is extinguished with water therefore if anyone of you is in state of anger then he must perform wudhoo". (Al-Targheeb Wal-Tarheeb).
3. Recitation of Al-Isti'adha. Say: A'OODHU BILLAHI MINASH-SHAYTAANIR-RAJEEM (I seek refuge in Allah

from the accursed Shaytan)

http://www.almahdi.org.uk/lectures/majlis_summary/152-211005-Allstiadhah%20Part%205.doc

THE OLDER YEARS – Rewards (Based on Raising Happy Children, By Parker and Stimpson)

Many parents and teachers have used reward systems to help children break patterns of difficult behaviour. They are often cited as an effective means of modifying children's conduct and they can work well in the short term. However, they are not a long-term solution because they lose their potency over time and offer such limited scope for a child to learn; is a child complying because they understand why they should, or because they want the reward? On their own, therefore, rewards are not enough to encourage self-discipline. Yet if they help you both feel good enough to take a next, more constructive step, they may be useful. There are four basic types of reward for behaviour:

1. Material Rewards: E.g. a toy, sweet, fun day out. These are bribes. If you need to resort to them out of desperation, use them sparingly. They are a high-risk strategy because the child who is bribed soon becomes the child who demands, the child who ups the stakes or, even worse, the child who loses self-motivation
2. Tokens: E.g. a star, sticker, certificate. These are sometimes useful as tangible evidence of parental appreciation, but it is the appreciation that counts most.
3. Acknowledgment: If a child's behaviour results in adult praise and acknowledgment, the child has a powerful incentive to behave that way again. Being told the positive effects of their actions on others (e.g. Thanks for sharing your toy, that make Aliya feel very welcome and happy) will boost their self-esteem.
4. Internal: When a child feels good about doing something because they know it is the right thing to do. This is the core of self-discipline.

Remember these are short-term options with limited value. Even if they succeed in breaking a behaviour pattern, you can then look to other, more educative methods of building on your relationship with your child and equipping them for the future.

RECOMMENDED READS

Conception, Pregnancy and Birth
Dr. Miriam Stoppard

What to Expect in the First Year
Murkoff, Eisenberg and Hathaway

Raising Happy Children
Parker and Stimpson



PERSONAL MOMENTS RETURNING TO EDUCATION

By Fatima Nurmohammed

Education is the knowledge of putting one's potential to maximum use, and encourages a person in how to think and make a decision. It also enables a person to receive information from the external world. It has been said: «Without education, a person is as though he /she is in a closed room and with education he/she finds himself/ herself in a room with all its windows open towards the outside world.»

This is why Islam attaches such great importance to knowledge and education. When the Quran began to be revealed, the first word of its first verse was 'Iqra,' that is, Read... Our Holy Prophet (SAW), said, "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave".

Today with this fast moving world, it is our duty to gain knowledge and skills from all corners of the world. It is never too late. All the luxuries of life will come and go, but the knowledge you gain will stay with you forever.

Alhamdulillah I have been blessed with opportunities to carry on with my studies all my life. I got married at the age of 17, which meant that I did not get a chance to pursue my further studies

at that time. At the first available opportunity, when my children had grown up and started full time education, I initially attended short courses to get used to studying again.

I managed to secure a part time job with an opportunity for further education. I attended one day a week at the University of Hertfordshire where I undertook an undergraduate degree in Computer Science. This took five years and a lot of commitment, for example, giving up some of my social life in order to complete the assignments.

Soon after obtaining a B.Sc in Computer Science in July 1996, I decided to take on the challenge of obtaining a degree in Arabic Language. I embarked on an Evening Modular Degree Scheme at the University of Westminster which involved attending two evenings a week and spending a further ten hours a week on my homework / assignments. This took eight years to complete and I obtained a B.A (Hons) in Arabic in July 2006. Soon after that I attended a four week crash course at the French Institute in Damascus.

During this time, my children were young and I faced quite a few challenges. One of these challenges was to make sure I had enough time to spend with them and not lose patience. I overcame this by being very organised and making sure that all the cooking was done in the weekends and there was enough food in the fridge on the days that I attended university. My husband took over the duties in the evenings when I was at class and this also helped in achieving my goal. When I had to miss my lectures due to unforeseen circumstances, I always made sure that someone collected my handouts.

Not satisfied with the two degrees and a thirst for knowledge, one fine morning, I felt someone telling me in my mind "Now that you have obtained your qualifications, it is about time you give back the knowledge". This led me to search into teaching opportunities,

and I realised that I had to have a PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education). I then gave up my part time job in 2006 and studied full time at Brunel University for a PGCE in secondary education, specialising in ICT. It was a very proud moment for my husband, who had fully supported me all the way. He also attended my PGCE graduation ceremony.

Finally, at the age of 52, I took up a full time permanent teaching contract at Sacred Heart Language College in July 2007. I thoroughly enjoy teaching and have never looked back, although there can be some very difficult students to deal with in the school. To keep on top of all of this and not leave my brain idle, I have enrolled at the school for Aspiring Middle Leaders Course. I also teach Arabic three evenings a week so that I do not forget the eight hard years of work put into obtaining my degree in Arabic.

My advice to young mums is this: Never give up on education. Everything is possible with a positive attitude.

If you would like to get in touch with Fatima Nurmohammed she can be emailed on fatimanurmohamed@mac.com

FROM THE TEAM:

If you have an interesting story that you would like to share with our readers and feel would inspire them, please get in touch with one of the Muslim Mums team members or alternatively email muslimmums@madressa.net and we will be in touch with you.

There are two kinds of knowledge which are very important for a human being. Secular knowledge (non-religious knowledge) is for day to day problem-solving and religious knowledge is for a smooth life on the earth and hereafter.

Religious knowledge includes knowledge of the Qur'an and the laws of Islam which are the basis for the Muslim way of life. The Prophet Muhammad said: "Attainment of knowledge is a must for every Muslim."

BLOG SPOT

A place for mums to air their thoughts!



THE KIDS' CUPBOARD

By Azra Sheriff
Dar-es-Salaam

With three under-fives, it's hard to keep track of the clothes they've outgrown, those that are still too big, and those that have graduated into hand-me-downs. So, every few weeks, a ceremony takes place where the contents of the kids' cupboard are regurgitated, sorted and returned, after much rolling around in the clothes pile (by the two-year-old) and some rudimentary folding practice (by the four-year-old).

These sessions always serve to bring home just how fast they are growing (the children, not the clothes). In the days where Aminah was an only child, the cupboard was...well, let's just say I never even knew so many shades of pink existed. Babygros give way to candy floss-type confections and then jeans and t-shirts and, more recently, a School Uniform.

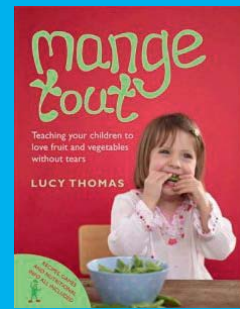
Then the boys came along, trendier and more varied in their colour scheme. T-shirts migrate from Ali's section to Khalil's with alarming frequency as Ali grows out of them like the Incredible Hulk. Sometimes I'm too late and they're small for Khalil too, and I step back, confused. In my mind, the two-year-old is still 'Nine to Twelve months' and the 4-month-old is just a 'Newborn'. Where does the time fly?

When it's all done, the cupboard looks like a Good Housekeeping feature, and a pile of now redundant clothes and socks settle in the aftermath. I'm struck with a pang- the kids don't fail to grow, month after month, and soon a day will come when they'll do their sorting themselves, and then...there won't be any of their sorting for me to do at all. I bury the thought quickly under the pile, breathing in the scent of fabric softener. I'm just glad that, for now, there is a Kids' Cupboard, and I'm planning to make the most of it.

Al-Barru (The source of goodness)



This great name of Allah (swt) is mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah At-Tur, Verse 28. It is said that if it is recited for a child 202 times, he/she will be blessed with good fortune and success at every stage of life.



BOOK REVIEW

MANGE TOUT
BY LUCY THOMAS
ISBN 978-0718152949
PENGUIN PUBLISHERS

Having trouble getting your little one(s) to have their 5-a-day? Or even 1-a-day? Getting scrunched up faces when offering them good ol' ringra or bhaaji? We all want our little ones to eat well, grow strong and be healthy, but mealtimes aren't always a walk in the park and a balanced diet can sometimes feel like an impossible mission.

Lucy Thomas has found the answer with her all-singing, all-dancing book. There's advice for parents and games for children that will tempt even the pickiest eaters into trying out new foods, without using the phrases "just try this" or "taste this"! With activities, songs and recipes for all the family to enjoy, children of all ages will soon be exploring, and tasting, an exciting new world they may never have touched before.

It's been tried and tested; it got my vegetable-averse son to 'brush' his teeth with broccoli, and eat the 'treasure' out of his cherry tomato. If it can work on him, it can work on anyone!

And finally, if you read the book and are really impressed with the tips and challenges Lucy Thomas has, then you can check out www.mangetoutkids.com for information on her nearest nutrition cooking classes and blogs. The website also has information on her one-2-one help sessions she offers.

ISLAMIC TECH CHAT

By Asad Hameer



The two most desirable phone makes currently are Apple with its Iphone 3Gs and Blackberry with 8520, 8900 and 9700 Models. The reason that they are so desirable comes down to their interfaces and most importantly, the amount of apps they have available. Apple does lead the way with the app store with an app for almost everything but blackberry is not far behind with its own app store. I want to share with you some of the apps that I currently use, which might be useful to you.

BLACKBERRY APPS

uQuran (free)- based on the same blueprint as IQuran, a must for any blackberry user.

SALAT (£2.79) – Uses the extensive GPS technologies in the Blackberries to determine where you are in the world and accordingly give you the appropriate salat times. It also comes with compass facilities to help you find the right direction for prayer.

HALAL FOOD GUIDE - goes through just about every ingredient, from gelatin to E-numbers and tells you what's Halal

and what's not!

IPHONE APPS

AL JAZEERA (£2.99) - my Number One App – it's my favourite news channel and the fact that I can watch it live is fantastic. The best thing about this is that you can watch it without Wi-Fi without it slowing down

ZABIHAH (£0.59) - if you're looking for a Halal restaurant in an area and want impartial reviews on it also, Zabihah is the app to download. It uses the GPS technologies of the Iphone to help you locate the restaurant using Google maps and you can even get information regarding whether the restaurant sells alcohol, and how pricy it is for example. **FIND MECCA (£0.59)** - this app only works if you have the Iphone 3Gs, it uses the inbuilt compass facility in the Iphone to help you find the direction for prayer. No need to carry compasses and it will even recite adhan once you align the Iphone to the right direction for Mecca.

IQURAN (FREE)- basically the whole Quran on your Iphone including free audio recitation for every surah, very well presented and organized with a choice of reciters to choose from.



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SMALL THINGS

Pulling your hair out trying to get your children to speak a language other than English? We all know the importance of speaking the mother tongue, and want our children to maintain it, but with the influence of school and friends, this is no easy task. This issue we have tried to provide tips on how to Inshallah succeed against the odds!



You've heard it before – Kids do as YOU do, not as you say. So firstly, try and speak the language at home yourselves - with your spouse and other family members.

Although it is ideal to start young, by no means is it impossible to teach older children to speak the mother tongue – they are introduced to new languages at school at later ages as well.

Even if they reply you in English, keep on talking to them in your mother tongue. It is sometimes easy to slip into English as well, but don't fall into that trap! For homework and the like, maybe call a time-out to explain certain concepts, but then always revert back after.

Ask them to repeat what they've said to you in your language, helping them out

if necessary. You may have to do this many times, but persist. To prevent nagging and putting them off, use a number of different ways to do this, e.g. by restarting their sentence with the right language for them.

Be sure to appreciate any effort made towards speaking the language; try not to correct every small thing, and never make fun or laugh at them when they get it wrong.

Don't be shy to ask family members/friends to do the same – consistency is important.

For older children, explain the importance of maintaining your mother tongue, e.g. to be able to speak to grandparents, etc. Stress the biological importance as well, for example how speaking more than one language can

slow down the effect of ageing on the brain!

Send the children to formal classes to help them learn to read and write the language as well. Another tool is to show them programmes in that language as well (this may be easier with some languages than others though!)

Use rewards – this works especially well on younger children. Short term rewards such as hugs and kisses for attempts to speak the other language, and long term rewards such as a treat at the end of a good day.

DON'T GIVE UP! Your efforts may not reap rewards straight away, but keep at it. Pray to Allah (swt). With every success, big or small, give the credit and thanks to Imam-e-Zamaana (aj) – he's watching us and helping us on our way,



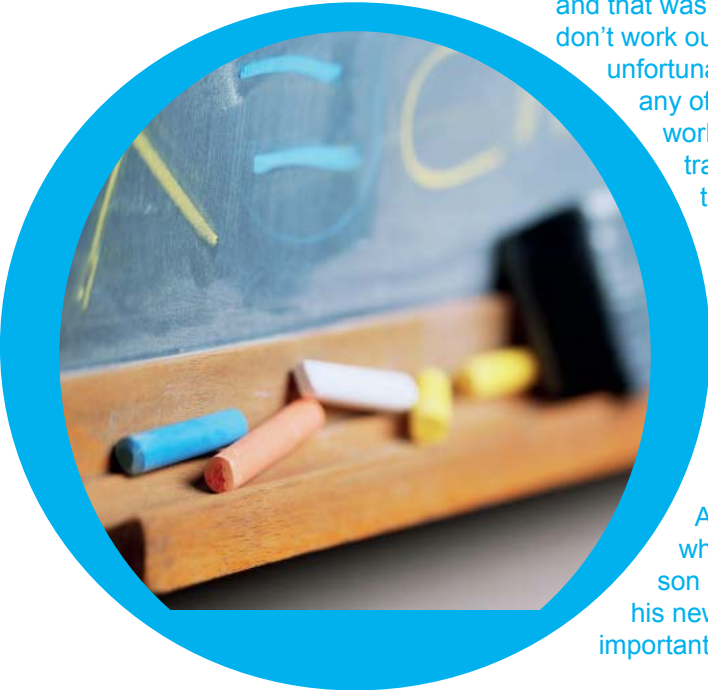
CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW - THE STEM SERIES

The much-awaited release has finally arrived! The Stem Series covers the Islamic Sciences, subject-by-subject and differentiated by age range. Each resource is meticulously designed, illustrated and authored to professional standards. This launch covers part of the Stem Series on the lives of the prophets Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and 'Eesa. Each delightful narration takes children on an adventure, exploring the treasures of these timeless stories. In their pursuit of knowledge, children will tackle obstacles on their path to reach the journey's end. The Stories of the Prophets are available as a set of five books for each age range, and also individually.

Please note that the differences between the two age ranges available lie in the complexity and detail of the story text as well as the cognitive demands of the learning activities contained in each book. Quite simply, a must-have set for children. All items reviewed under the Children's Book Review section, including these ones, are available to borrow from The Children's Islamic Library (www.childrensislamiclibrary.com)

OUT OF INTEREST SECONDARY SCHOOL SELECTION

By Anees Somji



be the best school for your child.

I am one of those parents who had decided from when my son was a few months old, that we would buy a house where he would be in primary en-catchment for the good primary and secondary schools. We would apply for the Watford Grammar, Rickmansworth and choose our third and inshallah, he would get into Watford or "Ricky" and that was that. However, things don't work out how you plan and

unfortunately, my son did not get any of his three choices. He worked extremely hard for the transfer test and scored in the top 25%, but sadly that was not good enough. We were fortunate, that with his score, he was able to secure a place at Bushey Meads School. I knew very little about the school, but after making enquiries and visiting the school, I thank the Almighty. He truly knows what is best for our child. My son is happy and thriving at his new school and that's what is important.

So, my advice as you embark on this journey is to:-

Understand your child and what his or her needs are.

Research all the schools around you for which you are in the en-catchment area for, and don't just go with the norm. Talk to parents of those children who already attend the school.

Find out the following:

Specialisms?
What awards the school holds?
Is it an improving school?
Does it cater for children of all backgrounds?
Does it have a learning support department?
Is the environment suitable for my child?

Once you think you have selected a few schools, make sure you attend the open evening and if the opportunity allows, visit the school during a normal school day. Observe not only the work, but the teachers, the students, their behaviour, how engaged they are in the lesson, etc.

Having done the rounds, talk to your child, ask them which school they liked

and why? Do they know anyone who is

currently at the school or is intending to apply?

Once you are happy with your schools the next step is to study their selection criteria.

Find out the following:

Will my child need to take a test?
Remember not all secondary schools require your child to take a test; their intake is based on your postcode and the distance. If they are required to take a test, find out what sort. In most cases the test comprises of Verbal Reasoning (VR) and Mathematics. The schools do say that your child does not need to prepare for the test, but I can assure you everyone does practice papers and a large proportion have a tutor to help them prepare. Practice is vital, especially with VR!

What proportion of children gain a place based on distance from the school?

What proportion of places is available for siblings?

Are there any specialist places? If so, what is the specialism and what test is required? Many schools have a selection based on Music or Sport. If your child can play sport, put them forward for the test. Remember the more criteria you select, the better your chances are if you don't succeed initially.

For example: If your child sits the standard test and also sits a sports test. When he is put in a waiting list, he will be put in 3 different waiting lists, distance from the school, aptitude and sports aptitude. The last waiting list tends to be the shortest and hence a chance of getting in improves.

Finally, make your choices with your child and don't forget to put Allah into that equation, as ultimately He will do what is best for your child. I hope this article has shed some more light on this daunting process and I am more than happy to discuss any issues that may arise from this article.

If you would like to get in touch with Anees Somji, please contact one of the Muslim Mums team members and we will put you in touch with her.

With National Allocation Day just recently gone by, when thousands of parents and Year 6 children learned the destiny of their secondary education, there will be those parents who will be embarking on the secondary transfer roller coaster.

For some, it's extremely straight forward, but for others it's a long, gruelling ride which only comes to an end shortly before or just after their child starts secondary school.

We fall into a false sense of security when our children are young and we have our children's life mapped out to the "T". We assume that our child will attend X, Y and Z school and then will attain a place in one of the Top 5 universities to either study Accountancy, IT, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy or something similar. We never consider the options around us and more often than not, we don't truly identify the needs of our child. We just want our child to attend the best school, which is academically at the top of the league tables.

There is nothing wrong with that, but sometimes the best school may not



IN HINDSIGHT

This issue we asked some more experienced mums and dads to share their wisdom and advice as to what they would do differently, if anything, with the benefit of hindsight. Here is what they told us.....

Looking back as a father and grandfather, I guess it boils down to education. I wish that I was more trained in raising kids, and that I had read more books on that subject matter. I feel that that would have made me more aware of the different methods of raising children, especially alternatives to traditional forms of discipline. I also would have liked to give my children more attention, and opened up more channels of communication with them.

We moved to the West many years ago and it was a hard work being in a new country and, adapting to work life and practicing religion. I left most of my parenting to my wife. Now that my four children are all grown up and have children of their own, I see them spending more time with them, changing nappies, taking them places and teaching them the fun side to life. I just wish that I had spent that little bit more time with them and enjoyed them a little more.

As a mother of three children and grandmother of four grandchildren, I would say that I wish I had kept up with the times. I often struggle to keep up with modern technology and sometimes I feel that my children and grandchildren who a lot more about computers and computer games than I do. This sometimes create a gap in enjoying life with them because I dont know what they are talking about when they say DS and Ipod.

The wide gap between my three sons has enabled me to enjoy cuddles for almost two decades. Listening to my seven year old recite Suras whilst getting a cuddle is a pleasure only a mother can understand. Tapping into a child's ability to learn difficult phrases and languages easily was key to teaching them Suras and other Islamic verses as early as two. If only we had used the same principle to teach them our mother tongue rather than fear that they would not be able to socialise and integrate at school. Finally, the guilt of a mother – “could I do more for my child” – is not confined to working mothers; perversely it would seem that working mothers give more quality time to their children, especially when self employed.

To be honest, I really don't think I would have done anything differently. I gave all I had for my two boys. I sacrificed my social life and any prospects of an academic/professional life at that time. I devoted myself to them, as I always felt that if I didn't make the most of my time with them, I would miss out on the most precious time in their life, a time that you never get back. Now that they are much older I have time to pursue my own interests and serve the community as I have always wanted to. Raising a child with special needs took every ounce of energy I had in me and yet looking back I am so grateful to the Almighty for everything as I feel that what I learned through my children, no university could have ever taught me.

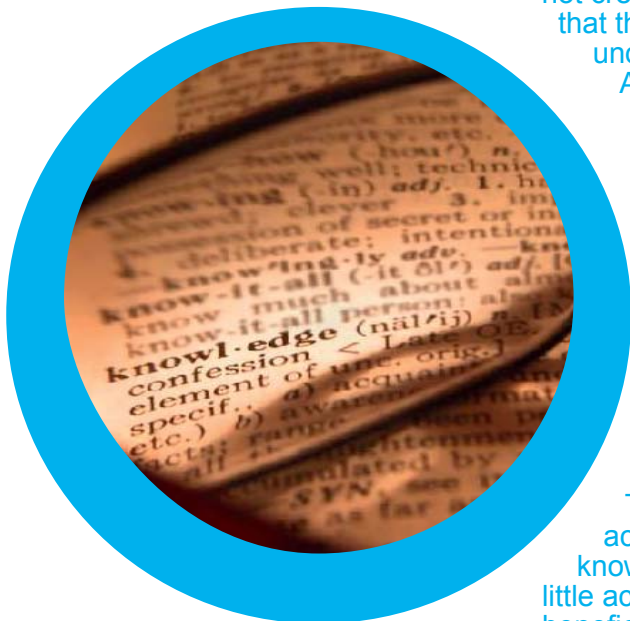
Motherhood is a blessing from Allah (s.w.t) that I have cherished from the very beginning. However, if there were some things I could go back and change I would do the following: To begin with, I would wait and have them a little later in my marriage after establishing my career and seeing more of the world. I would also emphasize a little more on them mastering their mother language. Children in the West are under immense pressure from society to perform academically. If I could go back I wouldn't push my children to conform so much to the norm and would let them explore other interests and hobbies

As father and grandfather there are a few tips that I would have followed but I never got a chance to implement myself. I feel, the up bringing of children starts at conception. Mothers should read max Quraan ,be happy, have a healthy diet and refrain from music movies etc. give sadqa, pray Namaz for the first of every month and other sunnat aamals.If she can take all the other troubles and pains of pregnancy then this is only a drop in the ocean as it will save a lot of bother and time in up bringing of the child who has been given the spiritual nutrition when inside mums tummy. My father always used to tell us that when you are young you have time,strength and less worries/responsibilities so you can spend time on doing Ibadat.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING KNOWLEDGE

By Sadiqa Esmail

There is an often quoted tradition narrated on the authority of the Holy Prophet (saw) that says, "Seeking knowledge is incumbent (farīdah) upon every Muslim..." While we may have heard this tradition many times, it is imperative to ask ourselves whether we have actually contemplated and acted upon it. Subconsciously, we may excuse ourselves by saying that studying Islam is only for the scholars; or those that live in Muslim countries, know Arabic and Farsi and have easy access to the resources; or that the tradition is more applicable to men rather than women because women have domestic responsibilities and family commitments; and so on.



However, the importance of being familiar with our religion and well informed has never been limited to a specific gender, people or time; rather the emphasis that has been given to seeking knowledge in the Qur'ān and aḥādīth, and the status of those who obtain it, male or female, is overwhelming.

In the Qur'ān, Allah (swt) holds the people of knowledge in high regard and mentions them with Himself

and His angels saying, "Allah bears witness that there is no God but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge..." In another verse, He (swt) says, "...Allah will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge, in high degrees..."

The Prophet (saw) said, "Whenever Allah (swt) wishes good for someone, He makes him knowledgeable in religion." He (saw) also said, "Whoever wishes to look at those who are freed from the fire of Hell should look at the seekers of knowledge. By the One in Whose hand is my soul, there is no seeker of knowledge who sets out in its quest except that Allah, the Exalted, writes for him the worship of one year and builds for him a city in heaven for every step he takes. He walks on the Earth while it prays for his forgiveness, he awakens and retires forgiven, and the angels bear witness that he is among those whom Allah has freed from the Hell fire."

The nature of the above verses and traditions prompts us to ask: why has knowledge been given such merit and importance in Islām? If we refer to the Qur'ān, we find that the ultimate purpose of our creation is to worship our Creator, "And I have not created the Jinn or man except that they worship Me." When our understanding and knowledge of Allah increases, so does the calibre of our worship and our actions.

Once the Prophet (saw) was asked, "O Messenger of God! Which is the best action?" He replied, "Knowledge of Allah, Glorified is He." So he was asked, "Which action should we desire?" Again, he replied, "Knowledge of Allah, Glorified is He." They said, "We ask you about action and you reply about knowledge!" He said, "Surely little action with knowledge is more beneficial than plenty of action accompanied by ignorance."

In another tradition, he explains why the rank of the scholar (‘ālim) over the worshipper (‘ābid) is seventy stations, saying, "...this is because Satan creates innovations among the people which the scholars recognises and abolishes, while the worshipper is only engaged in his worship." Knowledge does not only refine the quality of our worship and bring

us closer to Allah, but it also empowers us to guide our family and friends. By practically manifesting the characteristics of the people of knowledge, we can be positive role models for our children. Moreover, in the environment that children are growing up in today, they are constantly being questioned about their faith and principles.

As a result of intense exposure to non-Muslim and non-Shī‘ī ideas, children often pose difficult questions about contentious issues ranging from religious pluralism to Islamic punishments to intercession. We can only guide our children and equip them with the answers if we ourselves comprehend the details of our faith. Therefore, as mothers, it becomes even more vital to acquire knowledge so that we can bring up educated, well-informed youths who will be among the true Shī‘ah of the Ahlul Bayt (as).

It is important to clarify here that seeking knowledge does not mean that every Muslim must give up their life and job in London and travel to Qom or Najaf to dedicate him or herself to Islamic scholarship. On the contrary, this role has been designated for only a few members of every community. Allah says, "...why should not then a company from every party from among them go forth that they may apply themselves to obtain understanding in religion, and that they may warn their people when they come back to them that they may be cautious."

Nonetheless, it is necessary to dedicate a part of every day in educating ourselves about our religion and Creator. The Prophet (saw) has said, "If a day passes in which I have not increased in some knowledge that brings me closer to Allah, the Exalted, then I have not been blessed with the rising of the sun that day." This can be as simple as reading some verses of the Qur'ān, contemplating and acting upon them, "and these examples, We set them forth for men, and none understand them but the learned (‘ālimūn)".

The sayings of the Ahlul Bayt (as) are full of wisdom, and we can benefit considerably from their abundant knowledge. The Prophet (saw) has said, "Whoever among my nation knows by heart forty traditions, Allah will raise him on the day of Judgment with a deep understanding of religion (faqīḥān) and as a scholar (‘ālimān)." It does not matter wheth-

er we read a book, attend a lecture, watch a documentary or just sit and think; it is more consequential that the knowledge we attain is acted upon and ultimately draws us closer to Allah (swt). In history, we find the exemplary role model of an educated woman in the character of Sayyidah Zaynab (as). During the caliphate of her father,

the women of Kūfā would throng to benefit from her knowledge and wisdom in Qur'ānic exegesis, and she earned the epithet 'the one who has knowledge without being taught' from her nephew, Imām Zain al-'Ābidīn (as). Her knowledge, certainty and faith enabled her to speak with courage and confidence, and she openly disgraced the perpetra-

tors of cruelty against the family of the Prophet (saw).

We pray that Allah (swt) grants us the knowledge and fearlessness to follow in her footsteps.

FOOD FOCUS

EASY SOUPS

Quick, easy to make, filling, and highly nutritious - whether you need to bulk up leftovers, or just need a side dish to compliment your meal - soups are the way to go!



MUNG SOUP

Ingredients:

½ cup mung – soak overnight
3 big tomatoes
1 onion
Lemon juice
Coriander
Salt and Pepper to taste
Chicken stock – fresh or cube

Method:

In 3 or 4 cups of boiling water, add the mung, tomatoes and onion. Add salt and cook till soft. Once ready add the juice of half a lemon and some coriander leaves (finely chopped). Add the chicken stock.



CREAM OF SPINACH SOUP

Ingredients:

1 bunch spinach
1 potato
1 big onion
½ tbsp butter
1 tbsp flour (white or wheat)
½ mug milk
Dash of cream (optional)
Chicken stock – fresh or cube (optional)
Salt and Pepper to taste

Method:

Melt the butter, add the flour, and the vegetables (cut into big chunks). Sautee for a couple of minutes, then add some hot water. Once cooked and cooled (approx 15 minutes), blend the soup. Pour back into the saucepan, add ½ cup of milk, stock, and salt and pepper to taste. Serve with bread and cheese, or croutons. Enjoy!



VEGETABLE SOUP

Ingredients:

1 onion
4 tomatoes
Mixed vegetable pack
Chicken stock – fresh or cube (optional)
1 tbsp butter
Salt and Pepper to taste
Lemon juice

Method:

Grind the tomatoes and onion. Add the mixed vegetables to this mixture, and add 3 to 4 cups of water. Cook until vegetables are soft. Add the butter, lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste. Add the chicken stock – if using fresh stock, can add small strips of chicken as well.



Mealtime **M**anners

1. It is recommended to perform **WUDHOO**

Imam Hasan (as) said, "...The recommended acts are: ablution before eating..."

2. Wash your **H A N D S**

Imam Sadiq (as) said, "He who washes his hands before and after eating will be blessed at the beginning and at the end of his food. As long as he lives, he will be in comfort, and he will be sure of the ill of his body."

3. Begin by saying *bismillah* (In the name of Allah), and end by saying *alhamdulillah* (Praise be to Allah)

Imam Ali (as) said, "Whoever mentions the name of Allah at the beginning of (eating his) food or drink and thanks Allah at the end will never be asked about the favour of this food."

4. Start with a pinch of **SALT**

Imam Ali (as) said, "Start with salt before you eat. If people know what (benefits) salt has, they would prefer it to tested medicine."

5. Don't eat very **H O T F O O D**, but don't blow on it to cool it down!

Imam Ali (as) said, "Set hot food aside until it cools down, for when the Prophet (saw) was given hot food, he said, 'Set it aside until it cools down, for Allah, Mighty and Exalted, would not feed us fire when blessings lit with that which is cool.'"

Imam Sadiq (as) has also narrated that the Prophet (saw), "He prohibited blowing on food or drink."

6. Eat with your **H A N D S**

Imam Hasan (as) said, "...The recommended acts are:...eating with three fingers."

7. Bring your **P L A T E** close to you and eat

Imam Hasan (as) said, "...And the general manners are: ...eating from the closest spot to you..."

8. Take small **BITES**

9. **CHEW** well

10. Concentrate on your food, rather than the **PEOPLE** around you!

Imam Hasan (as) said, "...And the general manners are: ...looking less at people's faces (while eating)."

11. Don't complain about your **F O O D**

Imam Hasan (as) said, "...the mandatory (manner is)...to be content with it (the food)..."

12. Don't **R U S H** mealtimes

It is narrated in al-Ikhtisas: "Prolong your seating at the dinner table (observe proper eating manners), for these are times that will not be accounted for as part of your lives.", "

13. Cover your **F O O D** if you leave the table

Imam Sadiq (as) said, "Do not leave your plates uncovered for Satan spits on uncovered plates and takes from them what he wants."

Source: The Scale of Wisdom – A Compendium of Shi'a Hadith, M Muhammad Rayshahri

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