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IDEAL YOUTH IN ISLAM AND ITS PITFALLS

(4)

MEANING

Ideal youth in Islam is that which is good , decent and in harmony and keeping with the teachings of Islam. It is that type of youth whose life-style is exemplary and worth emulating by others.

By its pitfalls, we mean those dangers and risky things tempting to the youth and liable to mislead him to do such things as to prove harmful to real progress in life.

RECOGNITION

Islam recognizes youth as a potent force. As a sensitive and important phase of man's life, requiring careful attention and right training. A young man's heart and mind are like a clean slate, yet unpoluted by external influences. What is heard, seen and read are absorbed staunchly and deep impression^{is} created. Youth given right training and under healthy and sound conditions reflects in later periods of life.

And that is why the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) had forewarned us not to neglect this important period of man's life in these words:

"Two things one does not appreciate their value except when he is deprived of them :

- 1) The youth
- 2) The health

شَيْئَانِ لَا يَعْرِفُ قِيَمَهُمَا
إِلَّا مَنْ فَقَدَهُمَا
الشَّبابُ وَالصِّحَّةُ

"Let five things be valued
and appreciated before the
coming of five:

اَغْتَنِمْ خَمْسًا قَبْلَ خَمْسٍ

- 1) Your youth before your old age شَبَابِكَ قَبْلَ هَرَمِكَ
- 2) Your health before sickness وَ صِحَّتِكَ قَبْلَ سَقَمِكَ
- 3) Your spare time before getting occupied وَ غِنَاكَ قَبْلَ فَقْرِكَ
- 4) Your richness before your poverty وَ قَرَاغِكَ قَبْلَ شُغْلِكَ
- 5) Your life before your death وَ حَيَاتِكَ قَبْلَ مَوْتِكَ

"No servant of Allah would be able
to raise his steps (move) on the
Day of Judgement until he is questioned
on what he passed his life-~~span~~ and عُمره فِيمَا أَفْنَاهُ
in what way did his youth wear out" وَ عَنْ شَبَابِهِ فِيمَا
الْبَلَاءُ

Thus youth once passed away is not to return. The physical
strength and the mental alertness of youth once vanished
cannot be restored.

Many an old man may be repenting for having neglected and
wasted the potential opportunities they had during young age.

And the day is to come when one would have to account for
how he passed his youth, whether in sinful ways or in obedience
to the commands of Allah.

GROWTH

A child is born and its body limbs, its shape and its senses gradually grow. Islam has stipulated a period of seven years for a child to be allowed to play about and assist in the growth of its body and to satisfy its natural instinct. What it then sees, hears creates a lasting impression on its mind like an engraving over a stone. As such a healthy and right care by mother and nursery education during this period is of paramount importance.

Then comes the age of education both religious and secular, from the age of 7 to 14 yrs. It is by this age that the basic primary education- in which a child learns how to read and write and identify things. Also it is during this age that the essential knowledge of Islamic fundamentals i.e. Usool and Foroo- the Roots and Branches of our faith need to be imparted, with practice in Wajibat like Salat and Saum etc.

It is not enough to expect teachers in madressa to fulfil this most essential duty but the full participation of the parents at home is required. Unless they are strict in supervision children during this delicate age, there is a risk of the young to deviate from the right path of Islam. Besides, it is the period of insetting of Bulugh-puberty 9 years for girls and about 15 years for boys- when it becomes incumbent upon the young to perform Wajibats and obey the rules of Sharia- the Islamic code of life.

It is during this period of youth which strictly need to be guarded from being infested with evil thoughts as a result of undesirable company of friends or school-mates, filthy literature or films. Given sufficient and right Islamic education of what is good and what is bad, one can expect the young to grow up with strong foundation of healthy and pious way of life.

The Holy Qura'n in Sura Qasas ayat 14 reads:

"And when he (Musa) attained his maturity and became fully-grown, we granted him wisdom and knowledge"

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَاسْتَوَىٰ
آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا

It is mentioned that this ayat means the perfect growth and development of the young body and the faculty of reasoning. According to a hadith of the Sixth Imam, it is the age of 18 years when the peak of development and growth is reached. Let us note the importance of wisdom and knowledge as great blessings of Allah bestowed upon man.

And Hazrat Ali A.S. had said :

"And the height of a young man reaches its peak at the age of 24"

وَيَسْتَكْمِلُ طَوْلَهُ فِي
الرَّبْعِ وَالْعِشْرِينَ

Thus we see the gradual growth and development of youth between the age of 7 to 14 thence to 18 and finally 24 yrs.

Let us bear in mind that this age entails golden opportunities for a young man to educate and bring out from within his talents and train one's natural abilities to his benefit.

YOUTH'S CONTRIBUTION
TO ISLAM

History bears witness to the fact that youth played a profound part in the spread of Islam during the times of the Prophet. During those early days of the advent of Islam, the Prophet's message had entered so deeply into the hearts of the young converts that their faith in Islam had become firm and unshakeable. They volunteered loyally with the Prophet in eradicating 'kufr' -unbelief and the inhuman old traditions of paganism of the Arabs. They helped the Prophet in removing the numerous idols lying here and there in Arabia.

One such staunch young man was Sa'ad b. Malik, who at the age of seventeen had converted to Islam. Firm in his belief in Islam, he faithfully heeded the guidance of the Prophet without any fear.

In one of those days, when the newly converts to Islam were assembling at a place for Jamat-congregational prayers, a group of Mushrikeen- the polytheists arrived and indulged in their mockery and taunting them. This resulted into a brawl with a big fight between them. In the course of this, the young Sa'ad got provoked and raising a camel bone, he knocked down one of them, beating hard over his head and causing him to bleed profusely. Perhaps this was the first blood splitting after the advent of Islam, demonstrating how the newly converted Muslims were gaining power and confidence against their enemies.

Sa'ad relates that he was much attached to his mother and was always mindful of his duties towards her. When she came

to learn of his acceptance and conversion to Islam, she became rather upset and persistently persuaded him to revert to their previous faith of idol-worship.

One day, he relates that, she told him that if he did not abandon Islam, she would go on hunger and thirst strike, to the extent that she would die as a result. With profound, Sa'ad told her mother:

'I shall not discard my faith in Islam and I would appeal to you not to do that'

She did not respond favourably to that and for one day and night, she totally abstained from food as a result, she suffered considerably weakness. She might have thought that due to the existing mutual affection, the son would discard Islam to please her. But no, this was not going to be the case. Sa'ad says that despite repeated condemnation from his mother, he would not move. He told her:

"By Allah ! Even if you had thousand souls and one after another, they were to separate from your body, I would not abandon my religion"

وَاللّٰهُ لَوْ كَانَتْ لَكَ
أَلْفَ نَفْسٍ فَخَرَجَتْ نَفْسًا
نَفْسًا مَا تَرَكْتُ دِينِي

Finally, when his mother was convinced of his staunch faith and determination to remain steadfastly on Islam, she gave up her hunger strike and agreed to resume eating food. Thus, an ideal youth is the one who holds steadfastly his faith in Islam and is willing to defend it against whatever odd.

The Prophet (S.A.W.) himself was proud of the youths of his time, who unflinchingly sided with him in the propagation of the truth and eradicating the evils. It is recorded that he had praised the youth in these words:

"Verily Allah sent me as an announcer إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَعَثَنِي بِمُحَمَّدٍ
of good news and made me a warner and وَيَذِيرٍ فَحَالَفَنِي
the youths accepted my words and promised الشَّبَابُ
to support me (in my mission)"

On another occasion, the Prophet (S.A.W.) recommended not to desert and neglect the youth in these words:

"I advise you (to care for) the youth أَوْصِيَكُمْ بِالشَّبَابِ
who are good, for indeed they are of خَيْرًا فَإِنَّهُمْ أَرْقُ
the tenderest heart" أَفْنَدَةٍ

What better model of youth contribution to upholding and defending Islam could there be cited other than of the part played by Hazrat Ali (A.S.). It was Ali A.S. who first stood up to promise support the Prophet in the 'Dawa't zul Asheera'- at the invitation and gathering of the relatives, when the Prophet declared Islam and his Prophethood. Thereafter, until the last burial rites of the Prophet, it was Ali A.S. who obediently supported the Prophet and defended him.

Similarly, the History of Islam is full of profound records of the unparalleled part played by the youths of Banu Hashim for the noble cause of Islam. Kerbala is the culmination of this great sacrifice and contribution.