



# PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT TOWARDS CREATING A MORE ETHICAL WORLD

A PARENTS HANDBOOK



- Every member of any society wishes to live with dignity in a world of justice, equality, fairness as well as moral and ethical values regardless of their secular or religious orientations.
- Yet our world is divided and filled with injustice, inequality, prejudice and selfishness. Every four seconds a child dies of hunger. Innocents are killed senselessly; the poor go without an education, safe housing and opportunities to earn a decent living. Much of this is a result of the selfish and immoral attitudes and actions of those who use their power and wealth to oppress the weak.

- In order to change this situation, we as parents and educators have the responsibility to provide character and moral education to our children which we hope will enable and equip them to create a better world for all.
- It is only through 'Proper Moral Upbringing' (*tarbiyya*) that one can become a better human being, and hence contribute to a better society.
- Character education is a science and a natural right of every child. Just like in any profession, perfection is attained through training and skills; one must also go through proper moral upbringing to become a better human being.

WHAT PLACE DOES MORAL AND  
CHARACTER EDUCATION OCCUPY  
IN ISLAM ?

## THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION IN ISLAM

- Education in Islamic teachings corresponds to three aspects, knowledge, growth to maturity and development of good manners. However, the Islamic concept of education aims at producing good individuals with a deep understanding of Islamic values, which are universal human values.
- This type of education trains the sensibilities of pupils in such a manner that in their approach to all kinds of knowledge they are governed by the deeply felt ethical values of Islam (universal morality). Those who receive this type of education in a proper manner will be mentally so disciplined that they would want to acquire knowledge not merely to satisfy an intellectual curiosity or for the material worldly benefits but to grow up as rational, virtuous beings, and to bring about the spiritual, moral and physical welfare of their families and the society.

- The three aspects of Islamic education are:
- *Tarbiyya* in Arabic means 'to grow' and 'to increase' (proper moral upbringing). It refers to the development of individual, and to the process of nurturing and guiding the child to a state of completeness and maturity.
- *Tahdhib* in Arabic means 'to be refined, disciplined, cultured' and refers to the process of character development and learning a sound basis for moral and social behavior within the community and society. It includes coming to understand and accept the most fundamental social principles such as justice which is what Islam fundamentally demands from all believers.
- *Ta'lim* in Arabic means 'to know, perceive, discern and to be informed'. It refers to the imparting and receiving of knowledge, usually through training, instruction or other forms of teaching.

- The fundamental objective of the Islamic education is to seek a balanced growth of all aspects of the individual's personality, leading to a higher level of religious(moral) understanding and applying it to all areas of life.



## INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT: TARBIYYA

- The most important aim of Islamic education is to provide children with positive guidance which will help them to grow into good adults who will lead happy and fruitful lives in this world and aspire to achieve the reward of the faithful in the Hereafter. To know what precisely is known as 'good adults', one must have a proper understanding of the Islamic concept of the human being. The goodness of human beings in an Islamic view lies in their willingness:
  - to accept the obligations of the Divine Stewardship (*khilāfa*)
  - to seek to take on the Divine Attributes such as 'wisdom' (*hikma*) and 'justice' ('*adl*') which have been clarified through Divine Revelations and 'natural religion' '*fitra*'.
  - to strive for the balanced growth of the integrated personality made up of the heart, the spirit, the intellect, the emotions and feelings created by the bodily senses.
  - to develop their potential to become good human beings.
  - to allow the whole of their lives to be governed by Islamic principles of justice and morality.

- People do not achieve their potential automatically, for by nature they are forgetful and open to the influence of injustice and ignorance (lack of self-control). It is through education that they develop the 'wisdom' which enables them to be able to discern between right and wrong choices. What is taught and how it is taught at school as well as at home have profound consequences on individual's development.

## SOCIAL AND MORAL EDUCATION: *TAHDHIB*

- Education, like religion, can never be a purely individual affair, since individual development cannot take place without regard for the social environment in which it occurs. The sense of community in Islam extends from the unit of family to the wider society. In Islam the social existence has exactly the same goals as the individual existence, i.e. 'the realization on earth of the Divinely ordained moral imperatives'.

- The social and moral dimension of education in Islam is, therefore, eventually a matter of coming to understand and learn to follow the Divine law, which contains not only universal moral principles (such as equality, fairness, justice and uprightness), but also detailed instructions relating to every aspect of human life. Islam imposes the integration of political, social and economic life and the individual life into a religious and moral worldview. The Divine Revelation provides the knowledge of truth and falsehood, right and wrong, and the task of individuals is to come to understand this knowledge by deliberation and contemplation and apply it to their lives.

## ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE: TA'LIM

- Although knowledge can be derived from the Divine Revelation or from the activity of the human intellect-knowledge remains religious in a sense that it should ultimately serve to make people moral and aware of God. Hence, any pursuit of knowledge may be viewed as a form of worship in Islam. Religion, which in essence is morality, must be at the heart of education.
- Knowledge is regarded as valuable or complete in itself only when it serves to inculcate goodness in the individual and in the society. The pursuit of knowledge should stimulate the moral consciousness of the student and lead them to virtuous actions.

- Qur'an constantly exhorts the believers to pursue knowledge. In Qur'anic worldview, those with knowledge are seen as superior in God's eyes. It emphasises wisdom and guidance rather than blind acceptance of tradition. The pursuit of knowledge in Islam is seen as a religious duty (*farida*).
- BUT WHAT KIND OF KNOWLEDGE ?
- Knowledge in Islam is subject to two aspects. The first relates to its religious origin – Qur'an in this regard makes it clear that knowledge is a characteristic of God Himself (Divine Morality), and that all knowledge comes from Him.

- The second aspect relates to its purpose. In Arabic, 'to know' ultimately means to be transformed by the process of knowing.
- Therefore, true knowledge is the result of practical accumulation of *Tarbiyya* and *Tahdhib*.

## CURRENT APPRAISAL

- In the wake of modernity, Muslims, both in Muslim countries and in the West, have been committed to establishing Islamic schools and colleges which are often not based on strong theoretical foundations. Such schools, particularly in the West, have been frequently established in response to perceived inadequacies in the state system of schooling and they have been happy to contribute to the preservation of Muslims' identity and help children take pride in their religion. These schools, however, often fail to give serious thought to the nature of the education they provide or to the way they should deal with the philosophical and epistemological challenges faced by Muslims.



- Strong theoretical foundations ensures a balanced outlook in facing the challenges of humanity. It can contribute towards the strengthening of universalisation instead of particularisation (which often gives birth to the phenomena of otherness, self-righteousness and insularity). Both the concept of education and the essence of Islam are based on the principle of universality.

TOWARDS REALISING THE IDEALS OF  
ISLAMIC EDUCATION: PRACTICAL  
FOUNDATIONS AND METHODOLOGIES

- The development of children's character is an obligation we all share. Whilst parents are the primary educators of their children's character, according to the study of Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue, empirical research shows that parents want all adults who have contact with their children to contribute to such education, specially their teachers.
- A society determined to enable its members to live well should treat character education as an inalienable right of every child.

- Belonging to and actively participating in a school community is a deeply formative experience that helps students develop, amongst other things, their character.
- In a broad sense (as in the Islamic concept of education), character education permeates all subjects, wider school activities, and a general school ethos. It cultivates the virtue of character associated with common morality and develops students understanding of what is excellent in diverse spheres of human endeavour.

- Schools do and should aid students in learning to know what is good, to love the good, and do the good. Schools as the second and most important educators should enable students to become good persons (good human beings) and citizens who are able to lead good lives, as well as become successful persons (responsible towards society).
- Schooling is concerned centrally with the formation of character and benefits from an intentional and planned approach to character development.

- Human happiness ('flourishing') is the widely accepted goal of life. To flourish is not only to be happy, but to fulfill one's potential.
- From an Islamic perspective, human beings in their 'primordial nature' (*fitra*), are naturally disposed with virtues and are also endowed with 'intellect' ('*aql*') which is tasked with guiding and developing the character in accordance with the primordial nature in order to fulfill one's potential and consequently flourish.
- Flourishing is the ultimate aim of character education; it requires the acquisition and development of intellectual, moral and civic virtues.

- Character education teaches the acquisition and strengthening of virtues. Schools should aim to develop confident and compassionate students, who are effective contributors to society and responsible citizens. They need to develop a commitment to serving others.
- Questions of character formation are inseparable from these educational goals and are fundamental to living well and responsibly. Character development involves caring for and respecting others as well as caring for and respecting oneself.

## WHAT IS CHARACTER EDUCATION ?

- Character is a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct. Character education is about helping students grasp what is ethically important in situations and how to act for the right reasons, such that they become more autonomous and reflective in the practice of virtue and morality.
- The ultimate aim of character education is the development of good sense (*basira*), or wisdom (*hikma*), the capacity to discern between right and wrong choices.
- It is not only to make individuals better persons but to create the social and institutional conditions within which all human beings can flourish.



## SOME OF THE VIRTUES WHICH CONSTITUTE GOOD CHARACTER

- **COURAGE** – Acting with bravery in upholding truth and justice.
- **JUSTICE** – Acting with fairness in all matters by honoring rights and responsibilities towards others, oneself and the environment.
- **HONESTY** – being truthful and sincere in every aspect of one's life.
- **COMPASSION** – Exhibiting care and concern for others.

- **FORBEARANCE** – Overcoming one's anger and showing mercy and kindness in return.
- **GRATITUDE** – Feeling and expressing thanks and appreciation for all benefits.
- **HUMILITY** – Estimating oneself with modest limits.
- **INTEGRITY** – The quality of having strong moral principles.
- **RESPECT** – Due regard for other's feelings and rights.

- In addition to such moral virtues , school should also promote specific civic virtues, such as civility, service, citizenship and volunteering, which helps students understand their ties to society and their responsibilities.
- The most important intellectual virtue that students need to develop is 'Wisdom', which is acquired from the exercise of all other intellectual faculties such as reasoning, critical thinking, intelligence, common sense, keenness of perception. Without wisdom, none of the other virtues can be exercised in appropriate balance in order to produce justice.

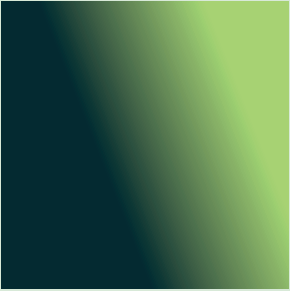
- *Wisdom can be seen as the main instrument of knowledge, and in an abstract sense, it can be imagined or equated with, a 'wise heart', through which all one's actions leads to justice.*
- It is the overall quality of knowing what to want and what to not want objectively and circumstantially, through a process of considered deliberations and well founded judgments in reaching the right decisions.
- It reveals itself in foresight, in being clear-sighted and far-sighted about the ways in which actions will lead to moral ends.

- In a macro analysis, to live without wisdom leads to thoughtlessness, indecisiveness,, irresoluteness, to lack of self-control, blindness and close-mindedness.
- In a micro analysis, it leads to selfishness, individualism, opportunism, materialism, tribalism, pride, self-centredness, self-righteousness and following one's whim, anger and desires.
- All the ills mentioned above lead to social injustices, for the eradication of which the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) came with the following message:
- *'The sole purpose for which I have been sent, is to perfect morality by perfecting the most noble traits of character.'*

## ■ Sources

- This handbook is based on the findings of J. Mark Halstead in his article 'An Islamic Concept of Education'.
- A research paper by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue entitled 'A Framework for Character Education in Schools'.
- Research conducted by Virtue Ethics Foundation.





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